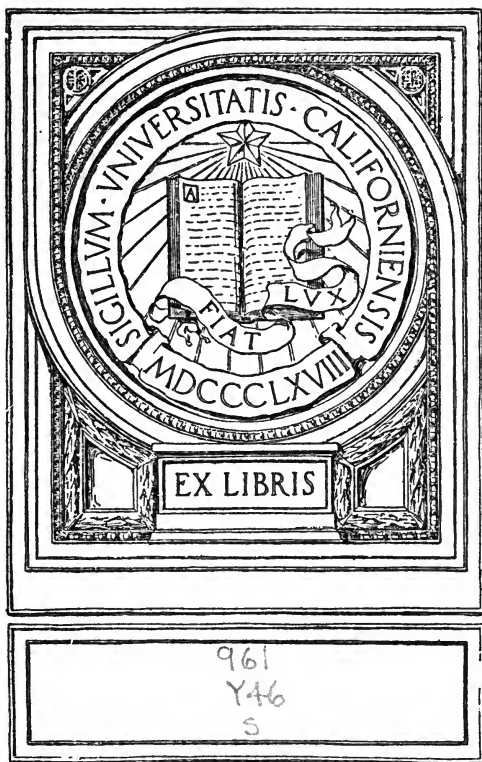
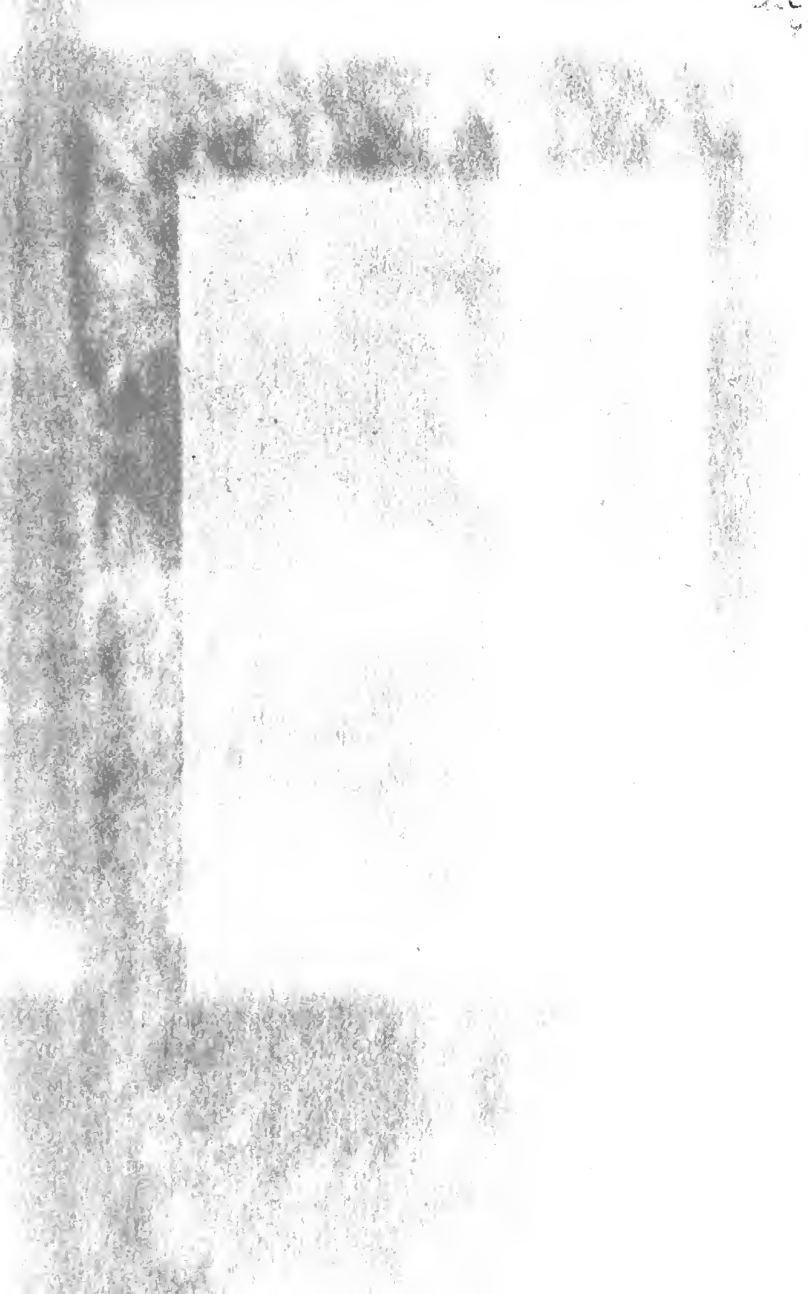


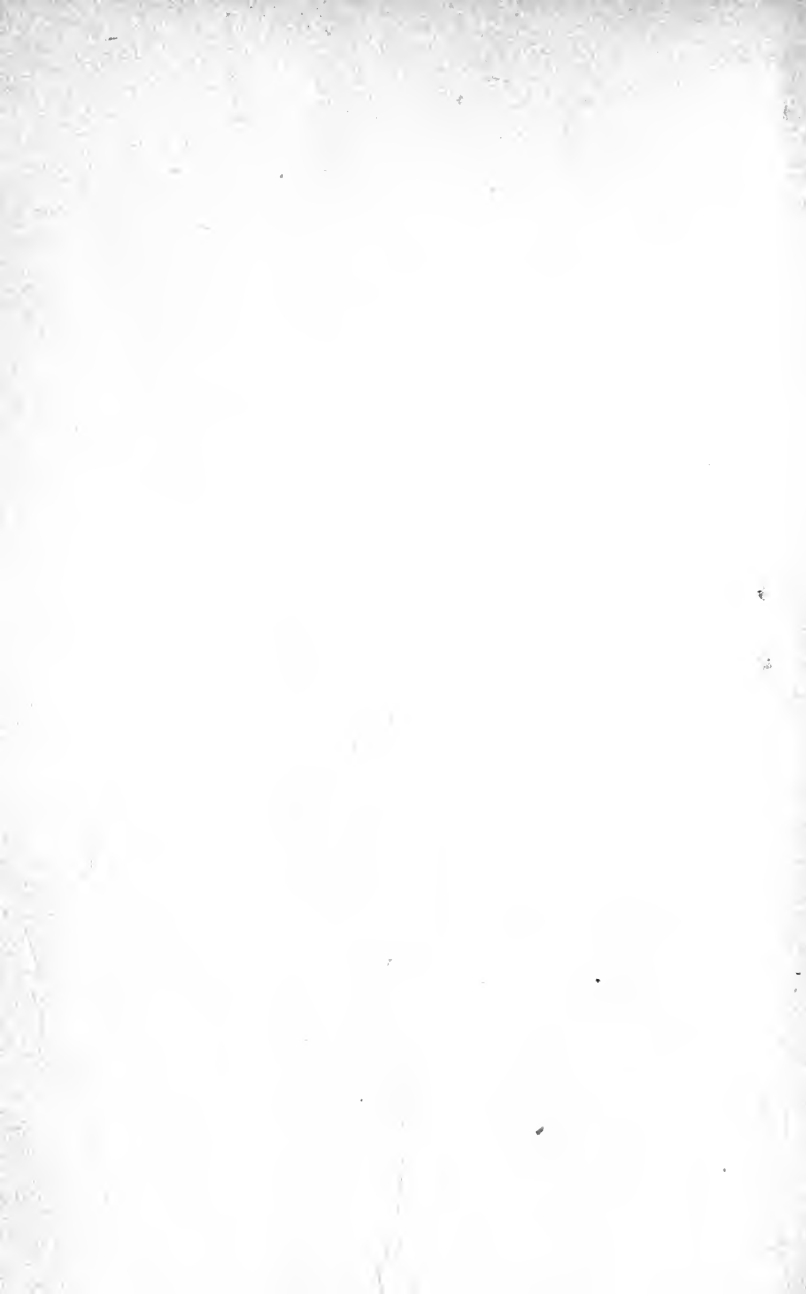
SOLDIER MEN

YEO





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SOLDIER MEN

NEW WAR BOOKS

TEMPORARY HEROES. By CECIL SOMMERS. With Illustrations by the Author

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A HIGHLAND REGIMENT. Poems by Lieut. E. A. MACKINTOSH, M.C. Second Edition.

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(Uniform with our Hospital A.B.C.)

ODES TO TRIFLES and other War Rhymes. By R. M. EASSIE (5th Canadians).

THE BODLEY HEAD

SOLDIER MEN

BY
YEO

UNIVERSITY OF
TORONTO

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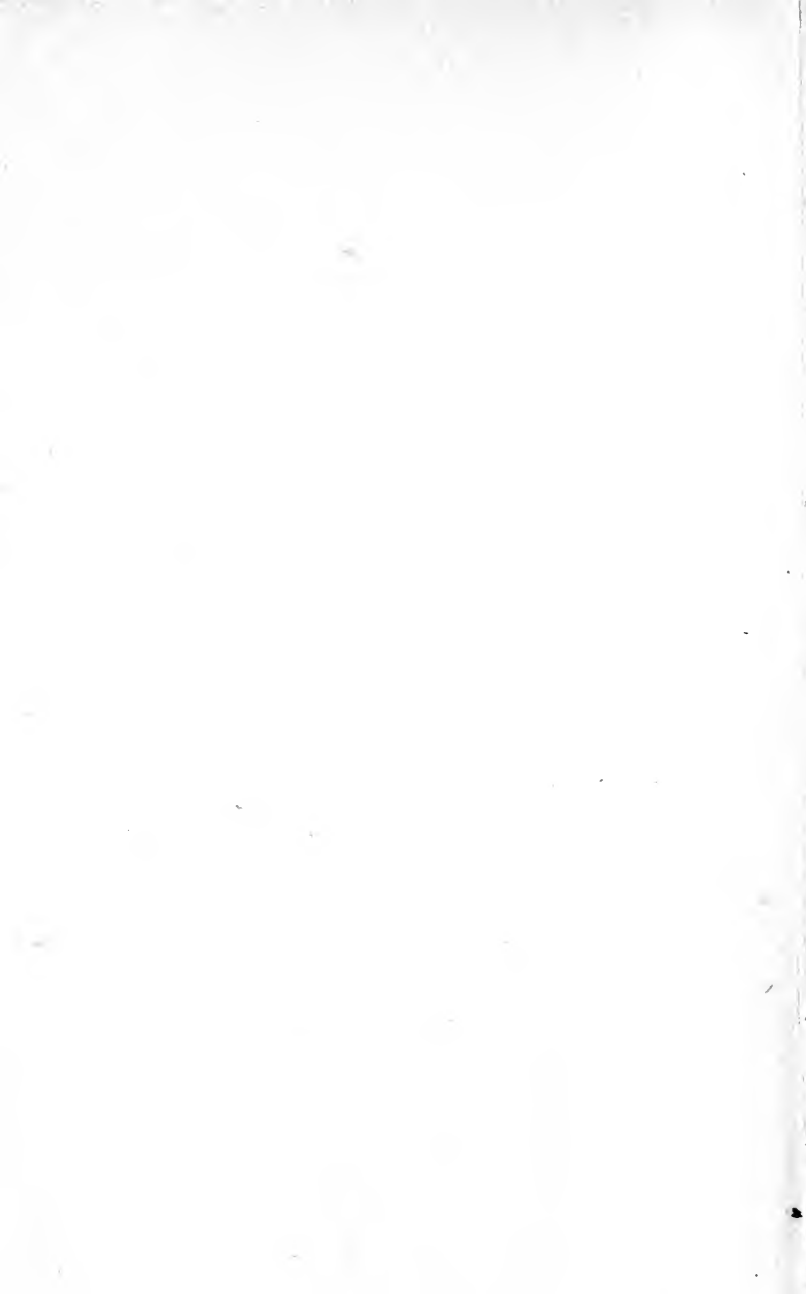
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SOLDIER MEN



A QUIET HOUR

IF you saw the conditions in which I write you would pity the poor jaded slave. I just settle down. Two clear hours. Hot and fliey, but still clear. I begin. "It was a dark and stormy night." "Message for you, sir." Blast the telephone. "Holloa! Holloa! Is that Repna? Holloa!" "Enta Meen. Enta Meen. Ya Markaz. Enta Meen." (The Native telephone is inextricably tangled up with ours. Something to do with an earth circuit, the experts say.) Try again. "Holloa! Holloa! Yes. Message for O.C. Tubh el Khiehl, did you say? Yes." "Enta Meen. Ya Markaz. Enta Meen. Ya Mahmoud." "Holloa! Yes, yes, I'm ready." There is a very faint voice trickling through the roar of natives coming something like this: "One, two o six Beer esses. Three four seven one Emma. Thirty oblique ten oblique sixteen oblique break ac ac ac oc Teehh el Kheell ac ac

ac break. No camel transport available ac ac
ac hire camels locally ac ac ac break please
render return of serge tunics and trousers and
field service caps with sizes by seventeen oo
to-day ac ac ac break Brigade Headquarters
wishes patrol reports to be sent in in future on
ac f one o two two ac ac ac break oc beer
squadron M——."

Then I go off to find the interpreter and tell him to hire me the camels. Then to the sergeant to tell him about the serge tunics. At last I get back to my chair. I begin again. "It was a dark and stormy night, the robber chief——" "Yes, what is it, sergeant?" "Please, sir, about them tunics. There ain't no sizes to them, sir. Shall I give the men's eights, sir?" "Yes." "Very good, sir."

"It was a dark and stormy night. The robber chief was sitting in his cave." "Please, sair, camel drivers. Say want 15 piastres a camel." The interpreter has appeared with two mouldy-looking natives. "Tell them they will get 5 and no more. Five is the price to M—— and this is no further." A flood of Arabic. Despairing gesticulations from the camel driver. "'E say you a hard man and 'e go for ten." "Five, I said." A fresh flood of

Arabic. Camel drivers in contortions. "'E say 'e can't go for less than seven. Very busy with cotton, sair. Seven a fair price, sair." "I've told them their price. If they don't like it they can leave it, and you must get two that *will* go for five." Camel drivers retire in tears.

"It was a dark and stormy night."

"Please, sair, they say they go for five."

"All right. Mind they turn up."

"It was a dark and stormy night, the robber chief was sitting in his cave. 'Antonio,' said the captain——" "Yes, what is it, sergeant?"

"Please, sir, are the working party to carry two feeds?"

"Yes."

"And the day's rations, sir?"

"Yes. Except breakfast. They'd better have that at five, before they start."

"It was a dark and stormy night. The robber chief was sitting in his cave. 'Antonio,' said the captain, 'tell us a story.' Antonio——"

"Turn out to water."

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OXYGEN EXERCISE

SCENE.—*A mud puddle in ——shire, in which are discovered forty yeomen in khaki lying on their backs and flapping their legs like seals. They are not really seals, but men whom their KING and country needs, doing breathing exercises. The reason they do not get up out of the puddle and walk away is that they would probably be killed by the enormous troop sergeant who is instructing them.*

Troop Sergeant (fiercely). Now then. Work at it. I'm 'ere to do you a bit of good, I am. Finest thing in the world, this is. Some of you fellows don't know a good thing when you see it. What is it that causes tubercylosis? Why, want of hoxxygen. That's what it is. Look at Sam Stevens—middle-weight champion of the world he was. And what did he die of? Why, drink. And what made him take to drink? Why, want of hoxxygen. That's what it was. If a man can't breathe hoxxygen he'll

drink it. How many cells do you suppose you 'ave in your lungs, Number Three ?

Number Three (inhaling through the mouth).
Don't know, Sergeant.

Troop Sergeant. Why, fifty million. Fifty million cells in your lungs you've got.

(Number Three, appalled at this revelation, inhales briskly through the nose in the hope of filling some of them.)

Troop Sergeant. And how many do you suppose you generally use ? Why, not half of them. Twenty-five million cells you've got doing nothing.

(Number Three exhales despondently through the mouth, realising the vanity of all human endeavour. The Troop Sergeant, satisfied that he has disposed of Number Three, glares contentedly at the troop in silence.)

Troop (exhaling through the mouth).
F-s-s-s-s-h.

Troop Sergeant (with sudden emotion). Look at your neck, Number Ten. I ask you, look at the back of your neck.

(Number Ten, feeling that this is a difficult feat to perform at any time and quite impossible when lying on his back, continues to gaze upwards, conscious of insubordination.)

Troop Sergeant. Why is it twisted like that? A bone out of place, the doctors will tell you. But (*solemnly*) WHY is it out of place, I ask you? Tell me that. Want of hoxxygen—that's what it is. It's as plain as day.

[*Enter Troop Officer.*

Troop Officer (explosively). A-tssh! Code id by head, Sergeadt.

Troop Sergeant. Ah, sir, if you was to do these breathing exercises you wouldn't 'ave no colds, sir. If everyone was to do these exercises there wouldn't be no doctors, sir. It's only want of hoxxygen that makes people ill. There isn't a man in this troop 's 'ad a cold since we began, sir.

Numbers Five, Seven and Nine (sur-reptitiously). A-tissh!

(The Troop Sergeant is about to ignore this breach of discipline when Number Three, who has been trying to repress a sneeze while inhaling through the nose and at the same time carrying the legs to a vertical position above the body, explodes violently.)

Troop Sergeant (ominously). Number Three!

Number Three (weakly). Yes, Sergeant.

Troop Sergeant. Have you got a cold?

Number Three (ingratiatingly). Only a very little one, Sergeant.

Troop Sergeant (appealing to Officer). Isn't it enough to break one's 'eart, sir? 'Ere am I trying to do them a bit o' good and 'ere's this man lies there with his 'ead tucked into 'is chest, and doesn't even try to breathe. There's only one thing that causes a cold. Want of hox—— A-tissh! A-tissh!

* * * * *

(A painful silence ensues. The Officer walks away, leaving the Sergeant to his grief. The forty seals continue to flap in the mud in ——shire.)

REAL AND FAKED

THE manager of the provincial bank which employed Richards as messenger was most enthusiastic when Richards announced his intention of joining the Yeomanry at the beginning of the war. He himself was not quite over age and was unmarried, but he was rather bloated, and he did not fancy the idea of military life. He therefore felt it incumbent on him to display a rather ostentatious patriotism with regard to such matters as employés and charities in order to rebut any suspicion in the public mind that he was not quite giving of his best. When, therefore, Richards came to him with his request, the manager exuded patriotism at every pore. He sat behind his desk, his body regularly swelling and deflating after the manner of fat men, and his watch-chain clinking slightly with the movement. His voice came out of him like some noise which

had nothing to do with him, and which was produced by no muscular action on his part. He did not speak. His voice just came. He was all the more complacently patriotic on this occasion because he did not believe for a moment that Richards would be accepted. Richards was nearly three years over age, and rather corpulent ; also he had a game leg and rather persistent rheumatism. It would be rather a nuisance if Richards was accepted. But, as he would not be, he could go with the manager's best blessing. The voice emerging from the manager made a neat little speech about patriotism ; remarked what a fine example Richards was to the younger generation ; and promised to keep his place open for him.

Richards went out with a care-free mind. He was the sort of man who always gravitated to a war. It was not that he particularly liked war. When he was at a war he always declared rather violently that he detested it. But nevertheless where there was a war there was Richards. When he was in the regular army he had messed about on the Indian frontier. When the Boer war broke out he had joined the Yeomanry. He now proposed

to join the Yeomanry again. Contrary to the manager's expectations, Richards was accepted. How he managed it nobody quite knew. He was an expert liar and very zealous ; he also had experience—and a game leg did not matter so much on a horse. The stomach he promised to reduce. His age he concealed.

* * * * *

The barrack rooms buzzed like a beehive. After a year of waiting during which they had quite decided they could never see service, the regiment had suddenly received orders to dismount and go to Gallipoli on foot. There is nothing in the world quite so electric as the atmosphere of a regiment about to go on Active Service for the first time. Each man is on the brink of an adventure absolutely unimaginable—a life whose smallest details are completely unknown—fearful as to his own behaviour—wondering as to the outcome and withal feverishly busy. A chaos of kit—of inspections—of harassed N.C.O.'s wanting to know if your bayonet has got a safety strap. What shall you take?—Have you got *everything*?—of men hurrying to and fro carrying things—of preoccupied officers. To the outward eye it resembled nothing so much as the

departure platform of a London terminus at the beginning of the summer holidays.

Of all the feverish individuals in the hot yellow barracks Richards was the most feverish. One-third of the regiment was to be left behind with the horses and Richards, in consideration of his age, his game leg, and his stomach (which had proved more obdurate than he expected) was one of those who were not to go. He had spent the morning trying to persuade a married man of his acquaintance of the sacredness of domestic ties. He dwelt pathetically on the lonely widow and children. He embroidered his noble appeal in the cause of the home with lurid tales of the horrors and hardships of Active Service. This he did not find so effective. It merely aroused fascinated, if horrified, curiosity. It was the sentimental line which worked best. He cajoled. He was large and inevitable, and he hectorcd rather well. He was also righteously indignant. "It ain't right," he said, "it ain't fair on 'er, you've got duties, you know, what you can't get away from. Leaving 'er all alone like that."

The badgered man who could not really give his mind to the controversy on account of a lost

pull through and one or two other problems of kit, gave way at last. He really was anxious about his wife who would be in a bad position if he were killed. Then there was that pull through. If he didn't go, the problem would stand over. And finally anything to get away from that large insistent cajoling voice.

Richards hurried off to the troop officer to try the effects of the voice on him.

"Sir, Wiggins says 'e doesn't want to go on account of his wife, and I thought perhaps I might take 'is place, sir. I know I'm old, sir, but I'm 'ealthy. I ain't never been before the doctor since I joined. And my leg, sir, ain't so very bad really. It looks bad but I can keep up all right, and you don't 'ave to walk much in the trenches by all accounts. Can't I go, sir?"

"It's out of the question, Richards. If Wiggins doesn't want to go I shall have to take Brant. You aren't fit to go. You'd never pass the doctor. You'd never stand the strain."

"I would really, sir. I'm stronger than most. And "(piously) "Brant's got a mother dependent on 'im, sir. What'd she do? I ain't got no one. Besides 'e's got a ingrowing

toenail. It wouldn't be right to take 'im, sir. 'E's too young."

"It's no good, Richards. If he doesn't go it must be somebody else."

"Well, would *you* be willing to take me, sir, supposing the doctor passed me."

The officer began to feel the effects of the voice. He had a feeling that Richards was with him for life. He fell back weakly on Spenlow and Jorkins.

"Very well ; I've no objection if the doctor passes you."

"Thank you, sir."

Richards had won the second line. He stumped off unevenly to the doctor looking rather like a retired pirate.

"Sir, Mr. — told me to tell you as 'ow 'e's very anxious for me to go with him if you could possibly manage to pass me, sir. One of the men in the troop, sir, that was picked to go doesn't want to, sir, on account of his wife, and Mr. — wants to take me. He says there's no one else can go, sir. He told me to tell you, sir, he'd never found my leg any hindrance to me, sir. And as you know, I've never had a day's sickness since I joined."

The doctor protested. "Your age is so against you," he said.

"Well, sir, I'm not over military age."

The doctor knew that this was a lie, and Richards knew that he knew, and the doctor knew that Richards knew that he knew. But after all there was no proof. The doctor reflected. After all, the man was physically sound except for a slight limp, and his troop officer should know best if this was a real hindrance. Officially the man's age was all right, and if his officer wanted him, it was after all nothing to do with the doctor. Also a man who was really keen to go would probably be worth two laggards.

Richards found the doctor a much easier task than he expected.

* * * * *

The corporal kicked Richards uncere-
moniously in the ribs. "Time for you to go
on," he said. "Turn out." Richards gave
a groan, and sat up. His craving for sleep
amounted to a torture. It was three a.m., the
weakest and most unnerving of hours. In
spite of his confidence the strain had told on
Richards. For nearly three weeks the regi-
ment had been in the front line, and for nearly

three weeks no man had had more than one and a half hours' consecutive sleep. Day and night each man did one hour of watching and two hours off. Sometimes when there were many fatigue parties, it was one hour on and one off. In the day-time most of the spare time was spent in digging. At night there was more digging and ration fatigues. Richards had been on a ration fatigue that night. For two hours he had carried and dragged a sack of rations which he could barely lift through the narrow twists of the trenches. He had got back at one a.m., and at three he had been turned out for sentry duty. Every bone in his body ached intolerably. Every ounce of his flesh was asleep on his bones, and had to be stretched back to wakefulness. His head felt too intolerably heavy to carry. He craved for sleep as he had never craved before in his life for anything. He had a feeling he would fall asleep as he stumbled his way to the sentry post.

He was left alone and the trench became still again. There was no firing to speak of that night. Occasionally in the distance a machine gun gave a short shatter just to show it was awake. The croaking of frogs rose and fell,

bubbling monotonously. Richards stared out into the dark. It was a comfort to be still again and to have something to lean on. It was very restful leaning against the parapet. The darkness just beyond where he could see strained and dazed his eyes. He stared fixedly at one point. The croaking of the frogs seemed to get into one's brain. It was very restful to lean. He gave a start. This wouldn't do. He was very nearly caught then. He must stand away from the parapet. He stood resolutely away from all support and his flesh ached. There was something trying to catch him which he must avoid—it was speaking with the voice of the frogs. It had something to do with that eye-straining mazy darkness. He mustn't stare too fixedly at any part of it or it would get him. It was trying to pull down his eyelids. Perhaps if one let them go a little—— He recovered himself with a start and ground his teeth. He had a moment of horror as he thought of the possible consequences of all this. He concentrated his will on his eyelids. No, he mustn't do that because then he stared at only one spot in the darkness, and that was fatal. He shifted his gaze. It was the accursed frogs.

He wondered where they were. He wondered if it would be possible to creep out very silently and find them and kill them one by one, and come back without being noticed. He mustn't think of the frogs, though, because that fixed his gaze. He shifted his eyes, but it didn't do any good now. One piece of darkness was as mazy as another. Perhaps if he kept moving his eyes from right to left—or rolled them. Or if he went after the frogs that would wake him. Perhaps they weren't really frogs at all, only the creature—

“Are you awake, sentry?” No answer.

Louder. “Are you awake, sentry?” No answer.

“Wake him up, sergeant.”

The sergeant seized Richards by the shoulders, and shook him angrily. He liked Richards, and he was furious he should have let himself in for this. Richards groaned.

The court-martial that sat in the hot sandy dug-out on empty bully beef boxes at Brigade Headquarters was very irritable, but extraordinarily just. Its irritability was natural. The Turks had selected that morning to administer shrapnel to Brigade Headquarters.

Every now and then court, prisoner and escort ducked hurriedly against the walls of the dug-out. Sand trickled down their necks. The flies settled in sheets. Once the packing-case table was upset by a clumsy ducker, and the papers had to be recovered from the sand. The justice was not so natural ; but it was there nevertheless. The Court was much more likely to err on the side of leniency than severity. Each officer that composed it knew and sympathized with the hardships that the men had to undergo. In so far as the ideal is ever obtainable Richards was being tried by his peers.

The evidence droned wearily on. It was a perfectly clear case. The only doubt was the sentence. They took into consideration Richards' age and past service. Three years' penal servitude.

The Court gathered up its belongings, and prepared to depart. It had been a nasty business. Richards was marched away. He felt absolutely broken. Penal servitude ! It had not even a military ring about it. It was a punishment for thieves. And three years ! At his age it seemed like a lifetime. It was hardly realisable. He could not believe it had

happened to *him*. This was the end. His life was finished. He was not resentful. He knew he had had perfect justice. He was an old soldier and he knew that what he had done was an unforgivable sin. He had endangered the lives of others—jeopardised to a certain extent the campaign. The punishment had to be severe, not only as a punishment, but as a help to others because the temptation was often so strong. Yet in spite of that he felt there was something *wrong*—not with his sentence. He recognised wearily that that was just—but something wrong somewhere else—something which hadn't anything to do with him. After all, he needn't have come. He had volunteered.

The war was over when Richards emerged from prison. He felt tired. Life had passed him by. He only wanted to settle down now. He made his way slowly into the bank. It looked incredibly the same. A new face looked at him from his old post. It was a man whom Richards had always detested. A man who jeered at Richards for giving up a good post to join the army, and who had afterwards, Richards had heard, become a conscientious

objector. Richards felt a sinking sensation of apprehension. He passed into the manager's office. The manager was still sitting in the same chair at the same desk, slowly swelling and deflecting, his watch-chain clinking. Richards had an absurd notion that he had gone on sitting there like that ever since their last interview. The intervening years were a dream.

Richards made his application. The manager was oily and apologetic. His voice emerged slowly.

"Very sorry, Richards. . . . Kept the situation vacant till the end of the war. . . . Then of course" (shrug). "Very hard luck. . . . But" (reprovingly) "a man must take the consequences of his misdeeds, you know. Couldn't turn the new man out now. . . . And of course . . . don't want to hurt your feelings. . . . I know it wasn't an ordinary crime. . . . But still prison, you know . . . reputation of the bank . . ."

Richards turned away dully. There was something *wrong*. He had the same feeling that he had that morning in Gallipoli. He passed out of the bank. The conscientious objector smiled at him jeeringly. Surely it

was better to have fought and failed than never to have fought at all. And yet there was that man with *his* job. He suddenly felt old. He couldn't understand things properly. What did he know of the Great Principles of the Inalienable Right of a Man to endanger his defenders by not defending himself. He felt tired, and wanted to sit down. He was on his way into a public-house when he met the sergeant who had shaken him on that memorable night.

Look into the Pewter pot
To see the world as the world's not.

The sergeant heard his story of the bank, and then offered Richards a place on his farm. Richards felt he couldn't understand things like he used to do.

TENDER TOMMY

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

THE CORPORAL.—A very large, very fair man of the Anglo-Saxon type, obviously has been a yeoman farmer. In civil life would be fleshy. He looks stolid and morose ; clean shaven.

ALF.—Also a large man, with a big moustache, rather like the “ Fed-up one ” in Bairnsfather’s “ So Obvious,” or the “ Haircutter ” in “ Coiffure in the trenches.” He smokes a pipe resentfully when he is not eating “ bully.”

WALT.—A much smaller man, with a small neat black moustache. He is quicker than the others, who are very slow and stolid, probably town bred.

THE ARAB.—A Bedouin rebel. Tall and incredibly thin, all his bones showing. He has a longish, straggly grizzled beard and very dark face ; he walks with a queer shuffle.

HIS WIFE.—An oldish woman. Very ugly, much pock-marked face, with dirty blue cast marks on the cheek bones and underlip, a thick blue line runs down the chin from the lower lip.

HIS DAUGHTER.—Aged about ten ; incredibly thin. Same blue cast marks.

HIS SON.—Aged about six ; also very thin.

DRESSES.—The Arab is dressed in a very ragged, very dirty garment, like a very large bath towel thrown

over the back and held together in front by hand. A fold of it goes over his head like a cowl. It reaches about to his knees. He has also a ragged sack across his back, the ends of which come over his shoulders. Barefooted.

His wife has on a very ragged specimen of the usual black native woman's dress. Her head is covered by a sack, which falls down her back like a dustman's. Barelegged and barefooted. She has a baby slung in a cloth over her back.

The children are clothed in a kind of dirty blue overall, reaching about to the knee. Shredded and tattered. Bare arms, heads and legs.

S CENE.—*An outpost on the — frontier of —; sand in all directions, dotted with little tufts of coarse scrub.*

A low hummock of sand at left of stage and on it a sentry lying at full length looking over the top to left of stage.

On right three men sitting round a little heap of equipment—haversacks, water-bottles, ammunition and rifles. They are very busy killing mosquitoes. All the men are deeply tanned, and their clothing is very dirty and torn. Many buttons are missing, they wear sun helmets, and their tunics are unbuttoned. One of the men in front is a corporal. They

kill mosquitoes as they bite quite automatically and unconsciously throughout the action.

Corporal. Got the bully, Alf?

Alf. Ah! (he pulls a tin of bully out of his haversack in silence). He begins to open it by turning the key. The key breaks. (He swears.) The others pay no attention but go on killing mosquitoes and staring morosely at nothing. Alf fishes for his clasp knife, opens the tin opener and digs it viciously into the tin. He progresses a little, and then the knife slips and gashes his finger. (He swears again.)

Walt. 'Ere, land it 'ere. You'll never do it with that knife.

(Walt takes the tin and fishes for his bayonet in the heap of equipment. He puts the tin on the ground and stabs it violently with the bayonet, then he picks it up and works the bayonet about, then he hangs it on a rock, then he puts it on the ground, puts his foot on the tin and levers the bayonet.)

Walt. 'Ere, lend us your rifle a minute, Alf.

(He takes the rifle, and still standing on the tin hammers the bayonet with the butt. All this with morose solemnity, complete absence of anger, and perfect silence.)

Walt. There! It ain't very grand, but you can pick it out now with a knife.

Alf. (*Having picked out a lump with his knife and began eating it, with his mouth full*). Jones's again. Why the 'ell can't they give us Fray Bentos. The animal wot this came out of was fed on banjo strings.

Corporal. Got the jam, Walt?

Walt. Ah! (*He produces a tin of jam from his haversack, looks morosely inside it, puts in his finger and thumb, and produces a large beetle. He flings it viciously away.*) Them ruddy beetles is everywhere. 'Tain't fit to live in this country ain't, what with beetles and things.

Alf. Let 'em 'ave the ruddy country, that's what I say. It ain't no good to anybody. Look at it! All sand and fleas! One pint of water per day, it ain't enough to wet your nose in if you got it, which you never do. An' full of dead camel at that.

Corporal. Ah, you're right there. They can have it as far as I'm concerned, an' welcome. If you wanted to punish anybody you couldn't do worse than give it 'im and make 'im live in it.

Walt. Fleas aren't the worst neither. They

don't do company drill all over your chest at night like them other things. And look at that scorpion what came crawling out of Alf's 'aversack the other day. 'E couldn't a' yelled worse if the 'ole snoozy army 'ad bin after 'im. 'E never was one for insecs, Alf wasn't. 'E used to go all funny like when he saw a earwig at Home. Laugh! 'E'd got all our biscuits in there too.

Alf (viciously). Let 'em 'ave it if they want it, scorpions and all. What's the good of fighting for it, it's just like us messin' about. It didn't 'urt the biscuits neither. These countries ain't fit to live in, look at that blinkin' beetle. *(He makes as if to kill it with his foot.)*

Walt. No, don't kill it, Alf! Give 'im a bit o' bully and watch 'im bury it. *(He gives it a piece of bully, and they all crane over to watch it.)*

Walt. 'Uman! Look at 'im. 'E's just like Alf, carrying rations. Look at 'im getting up on the top to 'ave a look over and see what's getting in 'is way. Look out, Alf, 'e's going up your leg.

(Alf gives a frenzied jump and shakes himself. The others start back.)

All right, Alf, it ain't a scorpion ! 'E never was one for insecs, Alf wasn't. Laugh !

Alf (bitterly). Call this a country ! They ought to do something about 'em. What's the sanitary squad for ? I dunno what we wants with a country like this.

Corporal (politically). Well, it's like this 'ere. What about Alexandria and Cairo. That's why we can't let 'em in 'ere.

Alf (sweepingly). Well, they can 'ave Cairo and Alexandria too, far as I'm concerned. They're no better than this, except you can get something to wash in there. And dirty ! Look at that Wasseh ! 'Ow they live I can't think. And the stuff they call beer ain't no better than muddy water. Give it to 'em I say.

(A shot off left. A bullet whistles over, and they all duck.)

Walt. Well I'm blowed. Shove yer 'ead down, Bill. That's right, *in* the jam. Laugh !

Alf (scrapping for his rifle and ammunition). Fancy firing at us. These black devils 'aven't arf got a face on them. They want teaching a lesson they do.

(They run up the hillock near the sentry who has already fired a shot. They fire a few rounds.)

Corporal. Cease fire, it ain't no good ; 'e's too far off.

Alf. Shall we go after 'im ?

Corporal. 'Tain't no use. You can't see 'is back for dust now.

(They return morosely to their original place. They resume their meal of bully beef dug out of the tin in the centre with their clasp knives, biscuits and jam.)

Alf. Shoot 'em. That's what I'd do to 'em, quick, and no more said. I can't understand their letting 'em go the way they do. The first one I meets I shoots. Killing our wounded the way they do.

Walt. Ah ! And killing's not the worst they do neither. You should 'ave seen them two pore fellows of ours what was found. You wouldn't be taking no prisoners after that.

Alf. If I 'ad my way I wouldn't take no prisoners. 'Tain't safe for one thing. That was 'ow pore old Bill got done in. Went to take a white 'eaded old devil prisoner as might have been his grandfather, and he up and strafed 'im in the stomach with a shot gun. Don't care 'oo it is. They say the women's as bad as the men.

Corporal (darkly). Ah! Shooting's too good for 'em, I say. After what they done.

Walt. They do as say 'ow they're starving now. Living on grass 'alf of 'em. Specially after that lot of camels we captured.

Corporal (darkly). Ah! Let 'em starve, I say. Starving's too good for them after what they done.

Walt. That's just it. They won't let 'em starve. As soon as they've finished killing our wounded they comes into our camp with all their families, and we feeds 'em up with dates and biscuits, and probably lets 'em go again.

Alf. We're too soft-'earted, that's wot we are. Them Germans wouldn't carry on like that. They'd shoot 'em quick, and no more said, like a nest of weasels.

Walt. Ah! that's right, and when we gets home the first thing we shall find will be a relief fund to provide food for the pore starving Snoozies.

Corporal. Well, they'd better not come near *this* post. They won't get no dates 'ere.

Sentry. Corporal, I can see arf a dozen of them blighters coming along about a mile away. Shall I give 'em one?

Corporal. No, you fool. Let's 'ave a look at 'em first.

(They go up the hillock to the sentry and look off left.)

(From left. Enter a middle-aged Arab in the most indescribable rags and the last stages of exhaustion. The Corporal, Walt and Alf come down to meet him. The family stand on the edge of the stage anxiously watching his reception. The sentry remains looking out.)

The Arab. (Falling flat on his face at sight of the Corporal.) Bimbashi. Bimbashi. Mongeries, mongeries.

Corporal. Yes, I'll bash yer alright. Grey 'eaded old reprobate. You ought to know better. I suppose it was your young 'opeful wot came shooting at us arf an hour back.

(They all stare at him with much the same amused interest as at the beetle.)

The Arab (in an agonised voice). Mongeries, mongeries !

Alf. Lord, 'e do look thin por beggar. Mongeries ! that means food, don't it ? 'E looks as if 'e 'adn't eaten nothing for weeks. 'Ere, 'ave a biscuit, old sport.

(The Arab devours the piece of biscuit)

greedily, while they watch him, and makes a spasmodic wriggle towards Alf.)

Walt. Look out, Alf. 'E's going to bite your leg.

Alf (*with dignity*). No, 'e ain't. 'E's going to kiss my boots. Gorbimey, 'e's a rum old devil.

Corporal (*suddenly remembering his duty, pointing to the rags*). 'Ere you, take your clothes off. Strip. Efta, aygry.

(The Arab lets go his rags, which fall to his waist. He shakes them out to show there is nothing concealed.)

Alf. Blimey, Walt, look at 'em. I never see such a thing in my life. Look at that big one on 'is neck !

Walt (*after contemplating him in silence for a moment, suddenly*). I say, old cock, don't you never 'ave a bath ?

Alf. Lord, though, ain't 'e thin ; 'e's a fair skeleton.

The Corporal (*picking up something from the ground and shaking it at the Arab*). Where did you get that, eh ? It's an Army sock, you old devil.

(The Arab moans slightly and shakes his

head. He readjusts his clothes, moans again, and sinks to the ground utterly exhausted.)

Corporal. Poor old fellow. 'E's fair done ; give 'im another biscuit, Alf.

Alf. Try 'im with some bully. They say they won't eat that though.

Walt. Won't 'e ! I never seen the stuff go so quick. 'Ere, old fellow, don't eat the tin.

Corporal. Don't give 'im any more, or 'e'll kill 'isself. Let's see if his family can do the disappearing trick as quick as 'e can. Poor devils, they've been through something. 'Ere, you family Bints, Mongeries, Tala Henna !

(The family approach timidly, and are fed with the day's rations.)

Walt (discovering a baby in the bundle on the woman's back). Lord, Alf, look at this kid, 'is legs aren't as thick as my finger. Cries just like they do at 'ome too. 'Ere, 'ave a bit of jam.

Corporal (to Alf). Take 'em back to camp, and 'and 'em over. *(To Arab.)* Come on, old son, you're all right. Lord, ain't they pretty near done ; lucky they found us when they did.

(Alf puts on his equipment and takes the family off right. The Corporal and Walt sit down again by the equipment. The Corporal

begins to search his haversack for another tin of bully. There is a pause, he begins to open the tin, the key breaks, he looks at it glumly.)

Corporal. Ah! Shooting's too good for 'em. After what they done.

Walt. Ah! (*Shakes his head.*)

CURTAIN

CORPORAL HARDMAN

CORPORAL HARDMAN had a lot to say when he heard the regiment was going to Egypt. He had a good deal to say about most things. He probably came nearer to omniscience than any other created being. And yet he gave the appearance of being very modest about the vast experience he had crowded into his thirty-three years of life. He was a large, fair man, with a yellow moustache and a very quiet, gentle voice. His most outrageous experiences were told in the most deprecating and telegraphic of undertones.

"Yes, sir, nice country Egypt," he said reflectively, rubbing his dandy brush on a manger. "Not been there much. Spent a few days there before I joined Foreign Legion. Way back from India. Exciting time Port Said. Set on by seven Arabs. Knives. Laid four of them out. Rest ran ; commandeered

a cart, carried four to police station. Most desperate gang in Port Said. Very grateful. Baffled police years. Wanted to give me illuminated address. Didn't want it though."

"I didn't know you had been in the Foreign Legion, Hardman."

Chronologically speaking he should have been leading a revolution in South America. But the unities of time and place were no obstacle to Hardman. The India and Foreign Legion episodes were new. But then, the regiment was going to the East, and it was unthinkable that it should ever find itself in a place about which Corporal Hardman did not know everything.

"Yes, sir, rough life ; often a week without food or water. March forty miles a day. Not long there. Very lucky. Followed up the Arab chief. All alone. Camel. Ten days. Found his camp, crawled in at night. Drugged him ; carried him off on camel. Wanted to make me an officer, but I was tired of it. Gave me my discharge. Funny lot the Arabs. Sultan. Algiers. Wanted to make me his grand vizier for defeating his horsemen in a tournament. Bareback, tent-pegging, shooting orange with

rifle, going over jump, all that. Tired of Africa though."

The officer was longing to hear more, but his attention was distracted by a batch of remounts which had just come into the yard and were whinnying loudly. As he turned away Corporal Hardman pulled out his watch and began almost, it seemed, to himself, his voice was so very deprecating:

"10.30. Yes. California. Always feed horses California 10.30. Horse gets excited 10.30. California——" His voice faded to the distance.

There was no doubt about it that Hardman had an almost unique imagination. When he first joined the regiment he had been looked on as a treasure. He had (so he said) abandoned a highly profitable business in Canada, and walked halfway across the wildest part of South America, encountering, with numerous hair-breadth escapes from natives, jaguars and crocodiles on the way, in order to rally to his country's call. Nobody had tried to reconcile Canada and South America. His far-away blue eye and mild modest voice had carried instant conviction. Besides he had a quite indisputable D.C.M., which he had won in

South Africa. He was looked on as a shining example to the men of the Empire. The Colonel used to point him out to inspecting Generals as one of the regimental star turns. "Splendid fellow that. Left a big business and walked halfway across South America to join up. D.C.M. in South Africa." The Generals would ask him about his D.C.M., whereupon he would inexplicably blush and stammer. He was always confused when asked about his D.C.M. Nobody ever found out how he won it. It was the one subject on which he was strangely silent. The general theory later on came to be that he could never succeed in inventing a story wild enough to account for it.

Scepticism soon began to grow. The extraordinary number of places that Corporal Hardman had been in at the same time first gave rise to the suspicion in the minds of some that perhaps after all he was a bit of a gasbag. After the South African war he had been in India and the Foreign Legion. He had then gone to America where he had done a lot of ranching "Out West," as he called it. After that he had built up a profitable business in Canada, and had found himself in the Wilds of

South America at the beginning of the war. That would have been all right. It represented a crowded, but connected life. But then he had also done a good many other things. He had headed a revolution in South America. "Offered to make me acting president. Not good enough. Too unsettled." He had fought for the Italians against the Turks under the ægis of "an old friend, Italian General, saved his life shooting big game, East Africa. Lion standing on him, knifed it." He had studied engineering in Germany, and exercises in Sweden. He numbered "old friends" in high places in all quarters of the globe. Nearly every one of his tales introduced a new old friend as Governor of Ceylon or Prime Minister of Australia. The achievements of his old friends were only second to his own. One—a Russian Count—was so fine a shot that at last the only thing from which he could derive any pleasure was shooting flying sparrows with a pea rifle at one hundred yards. The Italian General used to go lion-hunting with nothing but a spear.

The only similarity between the old friends was their unbounded admiration and affection for Hardman, which they apparently conveyed

to him in telegraphic speeches similar to his own. His minor achievements were quite countless. Encounters with bronchos, savages, aeroplanes, and motor-cars, shipwreck and crime were thrown off by the dozen in the course of the main theme.

His verbosity had carried him to the position of corporal before he was finally discredited. But the stomachs of even his most ardent admirers were turned at last. The climax was reached when a rumour arrived that he was known to have kept a small grocer's shop for years in one of the western shires. With that Hardman's reputation fell to zero. Everybody realised that Corporal Hardman was a mere windbag, and everybody took for granted that a windbag was necessarily empty. Nobody who talked as much as that could ever be any use to anyone. There was no redeeming feature about Hardman's lying. Some men lie because they are cursed with imagination. Hardman lied solely with a view to applause. It was naked, undisguised boasting. Everyone of his stories went solely to show how brave and clever and resourceful he was. Men felt instinctively that he must be even worse than he appeared. He was not

really a bad N.C.O., but he got the reputation of being the worst in the regiment. And yet there were two indubitably real things about him. He had won the D.C.M. in South Africa and he could bend a poker double in his teeth. Curiously enough, he seemed extremely shy about both these achievements. The result was he got no credit for either. The popular theory about the first has already been stated. People thought that possibly it had been one of those mistakes which do occasionally happen. If, they argued, he had really done anything to deserve the D.C.M., we should never hear the last of it.

Those who had never seen him bend the poker frankly disbelieved in his powers. They too argued that if he could really bend pokers in his teeth there would not be a straight poker in the town. Those who had actually seen it done, assigned his reluctance to perform again to respect for his teeth—or possibly to respect for other people's pokers.

Hardman himself hardly seemed to notice the growth of scepticism among his admirers. In fact, as the scepticism grew his stories seemed to grow in proportion. At first he had been more or less credible. The lion, the offer

of grand viziership, and the presidency of the South American Republic, were all later growths. When he first joined it was understood he had been a lance-corporal at the end of the Boer war. After the regiment had been in Egypt two months his old rank had risen to that of sergeant-major and then riding-master.

His troop officer had always wondered how Hardman would take the actual orders for Active Service. Would the colossal edifice of bombast break down, or would he face it out? Would the inevitable unmasking come when he first heard that the regiment was going to fight, or would it only come at the first touch of actual war? He watched Hardman closely when he told him of the orders for Gallipoli. Hardman rose to the occasion. Not an eyelid flickered. He showed no excitement.

“ Yes, sir, glad of an opportunity of meeting Turks again. Good fighters. Won’t stand cold steel. Italian war; killed seven one charge bayonet. All in the back. General said, ‘ Hardman bloodthirsty butcher.’ Missed last war, Balkans. Old friend, General Poulos, Greek. Met him surveying Mesopotamia, Government work. Fell into the Tigris, saved him. ‘ Hardman bravest man I ever

met.' Very words. Nothing really. Wrote to me. Asked me to be his A.D.C. I was in Canada. Too busy. Sorry though." His voice was as contemplative and weary as ever.

What could be the use of a man like that? He was bound to be a trouble when it came to reality. The troop officer urged this at the conference with his squadron leader that afternoon. A third of each troop had to be left behind, and the selection of those who were to go was a difficult matter. The best men were to be chosen, and the age, character and physical fitness of each man had to be weighed in the balance.

"Now about Corporal Hardman," said the squadron leader with a smile. Everyone always smiled when they mentioned Corporal Hardman.

"Well, sir, I'd rather not take him if the numbers can be made up without him. He's such an awful gasbag. I don't believe a fellow who's always boasting and lying like that could ever be any use. He'd be sure to get shown up as soon as there was any real work to do. It wouldn't matter so much if he wasn't a corporal."

"Yes, but after all, he won a D.C.M. in

South Africa. He must have done something to deserve that. It doesn't necessarily follow that because a man's a windbag he is going to turn out no good."

"No, sir, but it generally does. And as regards the D.C.M., nobody knows how he got it. He's never spoken of it himself to anyone as far as I know, and if he had really done anything for it, we should all have heard of it—often. You know these medals do go wrong sometimes. They always say they once gave D.C.M.'s to a list of men who had been put in to be inoculated for typhoid. Perhaps Hardman was one of them."

"All right, then, don't take him. He's quite good with horses, isn't he? He will be useful here."

"Very good, sir."

Hardman took the news that he was not going after all rather unexpectedly. The troop officer had expected a flicker of relief, an expression of regret, and some more boasting. Instead of which he seemed positively transformed. All the mildness went out of his voice. His blue eyes literally blazed with anger. For a wild moment the troop officer thought he was going to be assaulted.

"Not going, sir! Can't you get it altered, sir. I'd willingly give up my stripes, sir, if that's standing in my way. I'd go as your servant, sir. It isn't right, sir. I ought to be given a chance. Can't I go *anyhow*, sir?" His voice became angrily pathetic.

It was rather curious. Did he really want to go or was it merely an effort to maintain his part? He certainly looked and sounded convincingly genuine. It was odd that there was no boasting—no claim to go in consideration of past experience. He was certainly a mystery.

"I'm sorry, Corporal Hardman, but I'm afraid it's all fixed up now. We must leave somebody behind with the horses, you know. I daresay you'll come out to us soon enough with a draft."

Hardman turned away and spent the rest of the day apparently moping. For the first time in anybody's experience his tongue appeared to be locked. He failed to deliver his usual lecture on the ways of Mahomedans when Ahmet came in to clean the barrack room. He had not even anything to say about the habits of kites when one of them swooped down and stole a piece of meat off his plate in the barrack square.

Next morning, however, the troop officer had to come to him again. A corporal had been discovered concealing a temperature of 102, and in spite of specious attempts to demonstrate that a heat wave had damaged the clinical thermometer, had been hauled off to hospital under suspicion of pneumonia. This left a vacancy and Corporal Hardman was the only man to fill it.

Again the troop officer found himself wondering how he would take the news. Would it be possible to detect a note of regret in his voice? Would he keep up the part he had played yesterday? Hardman was moodily cleaning his rifle when the troop officer came up to him.

“Corporal Hardman, Corporal Jones has gone to hospital, so you will have to take his place.”

The old Hardman returned instantly. He took it quite as a matter of course. His voice took on the old off-hand tone as if he were talking to himself.

“Yes, sir; I’m glad of that, sir. You’ll want somebody to look after the new hands. Man of experience. Know a bit about the Turks, too; seen ’em before. Should have

been sorry to miss it. First war I ever have missed. Fighting man. Always was. You'll want that sort. Men seen as much as I have always useful. General Poulos said to me: 'Ever I go to war, take you'; very words."

The troop officer almost had a feeling of satisfaction that this bubble would soon be pricked. Yet the fellow would probably be a great nuisance. It was an awful bore to have men you couldn't rely on.

* * * * *

It was a quiet night when the reconnoitring party crawled out of the trenches into No Man's Land. The Artillery had gone to bed. Only a wakeful gunner on one of the ships in the bay occasionally fired a shell somewhere into Asia in the vague hope apparently that a convoy might be passing that way. Far away on the right the Anzacs were doing a little desultory bombing. Every now and then a sentry would fire a shot across the void as a warning to over-audacious working parties. Every ten minutes or so a Turkish fixed rifle would plunk a bullet into its favourite sand-bag. The frogs croaked monotonously. The patrol crawled slowly away into the darkness

and disappeared. It consisted of an officer, Corporal Hardman and two men.

Corporal Hardman had been a surprise to everyone. He had done well in the big attack. His troop officer had been sent back to Egypt from Lemnos with some transport mules, and had not yet arrived on the peninsula. His troop sergeant had been wounded by shrapnel early in the evening. Hardman had been left in charge of the troop. He had led it up to the Turkish trenches, and in the confusion that followed had rallied all the men within reach, and brought them safely back to the rendezvous in the reserve trenches before morning, thereby probably saving a score of men from death or capture. He had volunteered for the dangerous duty of the reconnoitring patrol, and had been chosen to go in consequence of the reputation he had won. Just before he crawled out he observed: "Sniper. Using German rifle. Curious report. Remember it South America."

It was an hour later that the "strafe" began. Probably a Turkish sentry got the jumps and thought the darkness was moving. The result was that the whole Turkish trench opened rapid fire with rifles and machine-guns. They fired

with feverish speed making a continuous roar like a vast wave receding from a shingly beach. The bullets swept over our parapet with a continuous swishing sound, like water from a fire hose. Within two minutes the Turkish artillery had caught the panic, and began tentatively shelling our front line and reserve trenches, obviously rather in doubt as to what to fire at. This provoked reprisals from *our* artillery, which opened with a stunning crash from a six-inch howitzer. Ultimately the ships' gunners crawled crossly out of bed and began peevishly shelling things in general. Between them they kept it up for about half an hour, till they got tired of fireworks, and one by one went back to bed again, leaving one or two enthusiasts still popping conscientiously away into the void.

What precisely happened to the patrol for the thirty-six hours after the "strafe" began nobody ever quite knew. The only person who gave much of an account of it was the officer, and he had not been in a fit state to notice much.

The moment the firing started they all four threw themselves face downwards in the long coarse grass just where each found himself.

The officer found a little ditch, into which he rolled and further fortified himself with a dead body which he found in it. He remembers distinctly his irritation when the corpse's head rolled off. He spent the next few minutes trying to remember the resisting power of semi-decayed corpses to high velocity bullets at about two hundred yards' range. Then he was hit in three places almost simultaneously (probably by a maxim), and remembered nothing more for a time.

Corporal Hardman was also lucky in finding a little cover. He lay with his nose in the grass till the "strafe" subsided and then cautiously lifted his head and looked round. "Are you all right, sir?" he said in a low voice. There was no answer. He then crawled off to search and after a few minutes he found the officer, insensible in his ditch. The first thing the officer remembered after being hit was seeing Hardman binding up his wounds and administering dabs with a wet handkerchief to his head. As soon as the bandages were finished Hardman disappeared again into the rank grass. At the end of half an hour he reappeared with the suddenness of a Jack-in-the-box.

! "They've got the other two, I'm afraid,

sir. They weren't near any cover. Riddled. They've got me too, sir. In the leg ; broken, I'm afraid." There was a long silence after that. Corporal Hardman broke it. " I think we ought to be moving along, sir, if we're to get back before daylight."

" It's no good, Hardman, I can't move my arm or leg, and my head's going funny too."

" I know that, sir. But I'll get you along somehow. If you're ready, sir."

" Fiddlesticks. It'll be all you can do to get back yourself with that broken leg. I've got some morphia. I think I should be done anyway. Get back yourself."

Hardman paid no attention to this. He simply began his preparations for dragging the wounded officer along with him. To threats, orders and cajolement he simply paid no attention at all.

What happened after that is very indefinite. The officer became delirious. Hardman managed to drag his burden halfway back to the trenches before daylight. Apparently they met a Turkish patrol on the way. The officer says he lay for several hours watching Hardman shoot hundreds of Turks. As a matter of fact, three comparatively fresh

Turkish corpses were found in No Man's Land by a patrol about a week later.

During the day they lay in a little sheltered hollow which protected them from all sides. The officer was beyond consciousness in a high delirium. Hardman was the only one of the two who had a water-bottle, and from the incredible quantity he drank when he got back to the trench, it has been deduced that all its contents went down his companion's throat. That little sun-baked hollow must have been a good imitation of Hell.

That night they finished their journey. The last hundred yards was really the most ticklish as they were in constant danger of being shot by the sentries. Fortunately, however, Hardman was heard before he was seen, and he dragged his burden up to the parapet and rolled over into the trench just thirty hours after he had left it the night before.

* * * * *

Hardman's troop officer arrived in the trenches that morning just after breakfast. He felt very new and inexperienced among men whom he had only left ten days before, but who now appeared to him as veterans. His studied unconsciousness of passing shells and

bullets stamped him at once as new to the trenches.

He arrived at the officers' mess dug-out just as breakfast was over, and managed to fish some biscuits and tinned tongue out of the débris. This business of eating within a few hundred yards of the enemy struck him as strangely unexpected.

It was not long before he heard the sensation of the moment.

"That fellow Hardman of yours has just done extraordinarily well. Went out on patrol the night before last with young Sullivan, and the Turks started a "strafe." Two of them were killed, and Hardman and Sullivan badly wounded. Sullivan was so bad he couldn't move, and Hardman had to drag him all the way back. They didn't get in till early this morning. Apparently he met a Turkish patrol on the way, and did them in too. I should think he'd get the V.C."

"How is Sullivan?"

"Oh, he's all right. Finish army for him, though, I expect."

"I'm glad Hardman's done well after all. I suppose he had the hell of a story about it all."

" Well, I should go and see him ; he's still in the dressing station."

The troop officer found Hardman lying on a stretcher with a very white face in a stuffy dug-out in the reserve trenches.

" Well, Hardman, how is it ? Hurting much ? "

" No, sir, thank you, sir. Going on grand now, sir. It's broken the bone though, I'm afraid, sir."

" I hear you did magnificently, though I've not heard the full story yet. What happened exactly ? "

Hardman seemed confused. He stammered.

" I expect you've heard all there is, sir," he said.

" They tell me you ought to have the V.C."

" It wasn't anything, sir. I couldn't do anything else." Hardman appeared intensely uncomfortable.

" Didn't you lay out a Turkish patrol or something ? "

" Yes, sir ; three of them."

The troop officer had never seen Hardman look so wretched. He offered him a cigarette. There was a pause. Hardman seemed gradually to brighten. The troop officer felt he was

still a mystery. Suddenly the old Hardman returned in full bloom.

“Reminded me. Little episode South America. Holding top of a hill, outflanked——” but the troop officer’s mind was wandering again. The man had always been a puzzle, but he wasn’t sure that at last he didn’t begin to see daylight. He dragged his mind back to what Hardman was saying. The story was just finished: “General said, ‘Hardman! Saved the Republic!’ Very words.”

The troop officer felt that the mystery of Corporal Hardman’s D.C.M. was solved at last.

THE WAR AND MANKIND

THE Turks had been shelling the hill all day. There would be a faint distant report—a scream, rising and straining upwards to an agonising and intolerable tension from which the bursting of the shell seemed the only possible relief—and then almost as an anticlimax the shrapnel would come whirring and humming down the hill crashing into bushes and thudding into dug-outs.

The men on the hill were in reserve, and the hillside was honeycombed with holes, like a warren, from which in the intervals of the shelling men would emerge like rabbits on a summer evening and go about the business of cooking food and boiling tea. The sky was faultlessly blue and still, the sea lay like a sheet of dazzling transparent blue light, the lovely warm brown of the scrub-covered hills and headlands shone in the still afternoon

sunlight. But the sun itself, perhaps on account of the menace in the air, seemed to shine through a faint black haze which pervaded the whole atmosphere of the afternoon.

Private Sweeting felt as if each scream and each explosion was biting into his very brain—a fiendish fantasy twanged on his naked and quivering nerve strings. He was very young—almost a child and was in reality suffering from complete nervous collapse. He had taken part in the great attack two days before, and was one of the few survivors of his regiment. He had fought gallantly on the day but the strain had been too great. His feverish brain was tortured by hideous memories of the hot things that had brushed past his face—of his comrades smashed and tattered—of his horrible isolation when he had lost himself on the night of the fight. As each shell came he buried his quivering face in the sand of his dug-out, each nerve in his body bracing and tightening to the tension of the scream and breaking sickeningly with the burst.

Private Fred Straker, who shared his dug-out and who came from the same village at

home, looked at him with an almost fatherly pity. He wanted to help him, but he did not know how to begin.

"Written home lately, George?" he said.

"No," said Private Sweeting. He felt that he must keep his mind too concentrated on the shells even to talk—let alone write.

"I wrote this afternoon," said Straker. "Told 'em you were well and all that. I wonder 'ow they're getting on with crops. Must be very short 'anded." A far-away look came into his eyes.

An orderly corporal passed and paused at their dug-out. "One of you two for water fatigue," he said; "now. At once."

A haunted look came into Private Sweeting's eyes. "*I can't*," he said. "It ain't safe. There they are always shelling that well."

"All right," said Straker, "don't you worry. I'll go." A look of relief came into Sweeting's eyes. He was too far gone to protest, although he knew it was his turn. He devoted his mind again to the contemplation of the shells.

Half an hour later Fred returned. He sat down on the edge of a neighbouring dug-out.

"Nearly 'ad me that time," he said, "the case of that last shell came rolling down the hill right on to my toes." He laughed.

Another tearing scream. A crash. An acrid smell of smoke. A moment's pause; and then the tense cries: "Anybody hurt?" "All right in that dug-out there?" "Good God! 'ere, doctor wanted 'ere; stretcher-bearer-r."

Private Sweeting raised his head from the sand. "Fred," he shouted, "you all right, Fred?" There was no answer. He stood up and looked round. The shell must have burst actually as it touched his friend. He started for a moment dazed by what he saw. "Good God!" he murmured, "poor old Fred. Good God!"

Then suddenly in a frenzy of impotent rage he jumped out on the edge of his dug-out and shook his fist at the distant impassive horizon.

"God damn the bloody Turks," he shouted.

As if in answer to him there came another rising scream from behind the hill. Private Sweeting dropped back to his dug-out before the burst came.

The shell seemed like the instant vengeance of the God of war against one who had dared to resent his sway. That frenzied feeble little figure gesticulating impotently against the setting sun had appeared almost symbolical.

THE WAY OF THOMAS

SCENE.—*The traverse of a trench in Gallipoli. Three privates are sitting on the fire-step cleaning their rifles.*

(Enter a fourth private grousing.)

4th Private. Another of these blinkin' silly stunts on to-night, I've just 'eard.

1st Private. What's the matter now, Alf? 'Ave they put you on ration fatigue again?

4th Private. Ration fatigue? Not as I knows of. No, somebody wants to know 'ow many Turks there are in that trench opposite, and a party of volunteers 'as got to go out to-night and find out. Silly, I call it.

3rd Private. Ah! Askin' for it, that's what it is.

1st Private. What are they going to do? Pop their 'eads over the parapet and count them?

2nd Private. Alf's 'ad enough counting Turks' 'eads to last him a while, I'm thinkin', 'aven't you, Alf? Laugh!

4th Private. Ah, I have that.

1st Private. When 'ave you been out countin' 'eads, Alf? I never 'eard about that.

2nd Private. 'Aven't ye 'eard about that? Funniest thing ever I saw. Tell 'im, Alf.

4th Private. There ain't nothin' to tell. Only in that last attack I got lost like, and I was crawling about in the dark, looking for somebody I knew when I falls into a trench. "'Oos 'ere?" I ses. "English fusiliers," says somebody. "'Ave you seen anybody of my lot?" ses I. "No," ses 'e, "but I think they're on in front." And then 'e told me 'e didn't know quite 'ow things were, as 'e'd only just got there. So I gets out and starts crawling again and arter a bit I gets lost again. And arter a bit of crawling I sees another trench in front of me, so I crawls up to it and "'Oos 'ere?" ses I. "English fusiliers," ses somebody; so I starts off again another way. They weren't 'arf coming over, too. I don't think I've ever crawled so fast in my life. And then I sees another trench, and I thought

it was the fusiliers again. So I crawls up and puts my 'ead over and "Room for a little 'un?" I ses, and then I see it was all full o' Turks—'undreds of 'em all ready with their bayonets glistening. As soon as they see me they starts jabbering away, "Allah! Allah!" as 'ard as they could go. Run! I didn't 'arf run. 'Ow they didn't 'it me, I can't think. I think they were as startled as I was. Probably thought it was the 'ole British army coming at 'em. Run! And after about a hundred yards I fell into a trench full of our own fellows.

2nd Private. I should about think you did fall in. Right on top of Walt 'ere. Nearly knocked 'is teeth out you did. And when you sat up you were so excited you couldn't 'ardly speak. "There they are," you said, "'undreds of 'em." Laugh!

4th Private. Well, that's all the looking over parapets I'm ever going to do. Somebody else can take on this job. I ain't agoin'.

3rd Private. Ah, waste of life. That's what it is. They know what'll 'appen right enough. It ain't right not no way you look at it.

2nd Private. I ain't out for no V.C. this

war. This trench is good enough for me. I'll sit and watch one of you doing fancy stunts.

1st Private. Can't see the good of it. You're bound to get done in if you go lookin' over their parapets and countin' 'eads. Askin' for it, that's what it is. They'll 'ave to go somewhere else for their volunteers.

(Enter an Orderly Sergeant.)

Sergeant. One man wanted to volunteer for reconnoitring patrol to-night. Let me know 'oo it is when I come back. *(Exit.)*

(A long pause.)

4th Private (contentedly). Blinkin' silly business. They're bound to do me in. Can't 'elp it.

1st Private. What yer mean, bound to do you in? It ain't your turn to go. I ain't been out at all yet.

4th Private. Yes you 'ave. What about that burying party night afore last?

1st Private. You don't call that goin' out, do you? It was a fatigue, and a ruddy smelly one at that. Course it's my turn to go.

2nd Private. 'Ear 'em! Laugh! You ain't neither of you going, so don't get at one another like that. When I was detailed to go up that old communication trench with Mr. — and it was washed out, 'e promised me I should go with 'im next time. So I've got to go and count the 'elmets to-night, and 'Arry 'ere can 'ave another burying fatigue to-morrow. You'll be an expert at it soon, 'Arry.

1st Private. Nice way o' doing things. Goin' to an officer be'ind our backs like that.

2nd Private (heatedly). I didn't go to an officer be'ind your backs. I——

3rd Private. It don't seem right to me. You'd better settle it by letting me go. I ain't 'ad a stretch for some time now.

1st Private.

You ruddy old liar, you were out last week.

2nd Private. (turning on him).

There ain't no question of *your* being in it this time.

4th Private.

Well, that about takes it.

(*Re-enter Sergeant.*)

Sergeant. Which is it ?

1st Private. }

Well, it's like this,
Sergeant, I was out
last, but it was only
a burying party.
'Tain't fair.

2nd Private. }

Mr. B—— 'e pro-
mised me I should go
out. 'E always——

3rd Private. } (*together*).

You'd better put
me down, Sergeant,
and settle it that
way.

4th Private. }

It's my turn to
go out, Sergeant. All
the others 'ave been
out since I 'ave. It's
only right——

Sergeant (cutting them short). 'Oo was out
last ?

2nd, 3rd and 4th Privates. 'Arry was.

1st Private. Burying parties didn't ought
to count. They're fatigues. I——

Sergeant. All right. 'Oo 'asn't been out
longest ?

4th Private. I 'aven't.

2nd Private.

Well, Mr. B——

said——

3rd Private. (together).

'E's been out
oftener than I 'ave.

It ain't right not——

Sergeant (to 4th Private). 9 o'clock sharp.

2nd Private. Well, Mr. B—— won't 'arf
'ave something to say to that. Arter pro-
mising me !

3rd Private. You never get a chance to
stretch your legs roofed up in this trench all
the while.

(A long pause, during which they con-
tinue to clean their rifles.)

4th Private (comfortably). Waste of life,
that's what it is. Can't see the sense of it.
I suppose I shall be dead afore morning.

3rd Private. Ah, that's right enough !

2nd Private. Mind my teeth, Alf, if you
comes back same way as you did last time you
tried to count 'em. Laugh !

SECOND-LIEUTENANT VEREKER

I. CHIMERAS

SECOND-LIEUTENANT VEREKER'S patrol filed out slowly through the barbed wire which surrounded the camp and formed up on the Desert outside in the blinding sun. Vereker felt that the weight of Empire hung on his shoulders. He was very young, and he had only just arrived from England. He felt rather diffident. Not only had he suddenly been deposited in a regiment he had never seen before, but it was a regiment which had seen seven months of active service in Gallipoli and on the Western Frontier, while he himself had never heard a shot fired. It made one feel rather shy and enormously conscientious.

The task with which he had been entrusted was not a difficult one or it would never have fallen to him. He had been given a troop

and told to patrol along the coast road as far as a certain house about fifteen miles distant from the camp, and then to return. The object of the patrol was merely to round up any wandering Bedouins who happened to be prowling about in the vicinity of the camp. There was practically no chance of meeting any enemy. They had already been twice soundly beaten, and the nearest body of them was a discreet eighty miles away. Vereker had been told all this, but he did not believe it. He had exciting and interesting, if slightly alarming visions, of encounters with large bodies of burnous-clad Arabs mounted on richly decorated Barbs and waving silver-mounted guns and lances. He saw himself returning to camp that afternoon a war-worn veteran who had gained experience. If his visions were really to come true the day was to work vast changes in his personal appearance. He saw himself haggard and very sunburnt and dusty. He would probably have grown a moustache. As it was, his face was rather pink and round.

He made his dispositions with the most minute care. He almost delivered a lecture on the duties of advance and flank guards,

The men listened stolidly. They would probably have taken up their position automatically if he had never said anything at all. They were all old hands. But all officers had their little peculiarities, and they liked Vereker. Vereker, on the other hand, felt that the fate of the campaign hung on the minuteness with which he carried out the instructions laid down in the cavalry book.

The advanced points galloped out, and the little patrol moved off. Vereker had no one to talk to except the sergeant, and he was a little shy of the sergeant. Vereker looked on him as a veteran who would probably despise young officers. As a matter of fact the sergeant had never given Vereker a thought. He was morosely wondering what time they would get back from this fool's business, and speculating on the possibility of running across sheep. He was very fond of liver and bacon.

Vereker rode in silence. The road lay through coarse sandy scrub. Far away on the right was the dazzling snow of sea-shore and a couple of palm trees. Two or three miles to the left lay the precipitous grey cliffs from the top of which stretched the Libyan desert.

They were scarred and sinister with deep rocky wadis, and they looked still, secretive, expectant. Right and left the sand and scrub stretched between sea and hills in low undulating waves. The air was breathless. The heat shimmered a little over the rocks. The sun blazed overhead silently and insistently. It blazed back from the dazzling yellow sand with equal insistence. There was not a sound or stir of animal or plant. As always, the desert seemed to be eternally waiting—watching—for a climax.

This feeling that the desert was watching him expectantly, unblinkingly, luring him on as it were with its breathless silence to the crisis it was awaiting began to grow on Vereker. The unvarying sun dazed him a little. The monotony of the long ride lulled him. He felt almost sleepy.

He began to think of what was coming. He tried to picture the enemy riding down the road against him. Somehow as soon as he got the enemy into it the picture lost its reality. The desert became like a dream desert. He wondered what it felt like to have bullets flying all round you. He tried to imagine stepping out from the marker's

shelter on the range when firing practice was going on. It was not a nice thought. Still he thought he *could* have done it—by doing it quickly and not thinking too much. Still of course there wouldn't be the excitement then. He felt rather nervous. He was not frightened of death but of the Unknown. Suppose he *did* disgrace himself—got in a panic. He shuddered. One could not be sure. But chiefly there was a nervous anticipation of a completely unknown experience. He had felt a little like this just before he was given chloroform for the first time. He was not afraid of it. But it was the Unknown. Then this desert was oppressing him. It was so terrifyingly still.

He began to think of the enemy coming down the road again. He would call in the flank and rear guards (he felt for his whistle), then he would put his led horses *there* and form up his men on *that* ridge. Then if the enemy were too many for him, he would fall back gradually on the camp. It was all very simple. Suddenly he had a nasty thought. What on earth could he do with the wounded? He knew that for no consideration on earth could they be left to the barbarities of the Arabs.

But how *on earth* would he get them away? And then, if some horses got shot and some men had to walk. What was to happen then? You couldn't put a badly wounded man across the front of your saddle like a greatcoat.

What a fool he had been not to ask about these things before he started. Perhaps the sergeant would know. He didn't like to ask him though. He looked so very morose (there were no signs of sheep). Vereker didn't want to display his ignorance.

"There's a nice patch of spring onions over there by that 'ouse, sir," said the sergeant suddenly, pointing to a square tumble-down stone hut on the right. "Corporal Paster will see about them though. 'E's got an empty nosebag." (Corporal Paster had charge of the right flank guard.)

Vereker started. What on earth had spring onions to do with his train of thought? Or indeed with the business in hand? He looked at the sergeant curiously. Spring onions! And in an hour they might be charging an enemy with swords.

The hills were edging down towards the road now. The road was about to leave the low-lying flat by the sea and to climb up

through a narrow pass on to the Libyan plateau at the top. The nearer they drew to the pass the more forbidding it looked. It seemed like an open mouth waiting for the patrol to pass into it before it closed its jaws.

The stillness made it seem even more formidable. The utter silence of the place gave Vereker a feeling of complete isolation. The camp had passed out of his world. He was entirely alone in this still pitiless place with thousands of invisible enemy, who were not really human, waiting for him.

Nature seemed to have gone mad at this particular place. Instead of the monotonous sweep of the scrubby desert there was the insane jumble of a nightmare.

It was a vast stormy sea of stones. Deep precipitous gullies ran and crossed in all directions, running up to sharp inky dark points and caves widening out of seemingly fathomless valleys with steep sloping sides writhing, twisting, crossing, heaving up great isolated lumps and mounds of rock, screwing into dark grooves and tunnels. It was like nothing so much as a petrified Atlantic storm. And with all this riot of convulsion—absolute

silence. One felt as if this chaos of rocks and sand should be noisy—boisterous. Now it seemed to have paused—listening. The road itself, carried on a sort of embankment above the tumult, was the only sane ordered thing in sight.

There had been a battle there a month before, and the evidences of it were still visible. There was a dead horse, bloated and swollen, its legs bristling stiffly. There was a helmet, a piece of newspaper, a bully beef tin, a dixy, half a puttee. They looked like the remnants of some ghastly picnic. All these things showed up in the sun with a sort of grizzly brilliancy.

It seemed impossible that these gullies, so full of the enemy only a month ago, should now be empty. Any one of them might have hidden a thousand. The dark shadows of the caves and overhanging rocks looked pregnant—menacing. It was impossible to search them all. Vereker imagined his retreat cut off. He thought of the problem of the wounded again. If only something would break the stillness. If he could only have some evidence that there were other human beings in the world besides his little patrol.

"There's somebody coming over that rise there, I think, sir. 'Bout a mile and a 'alf away." Vereker started slightly. The sergeant's voice came so suddenly out of the stillness, and seemed to break the spell a little. Vereker halted his little party. Yes, there were about half a dozen coming down the road in front. He could not see whether they were armed. The advanced points had just sighted them and were closing in. He felt a sense of disappointment. The menace of the hills had lifted; but those figures were ridiculous. Nothing seemed to have happened definitely. He couldn't call in his flank guards and take up a position just for these little figures. He imagined that when it happened it would happen conclusively, with shouting and shots. This was just meeting somebody on the road. He decided to go on. He then remembered something about an officer's place being in front, and trotted on to catch up the advanced points. He was glad to have something to do. He wondered when the shooting would begin. His points were quite close to the natives now. Nobody seemed in the least excited. Next moment he realised that there would be no

shots. It was simply a wandering Bedouin and his son with their wives and families. The still menace of the hills seemed to settle down again a little. But he was too interested to notice it much. He had never seen a desert Arab before. He found these disappointingly like the people he had seen in Alexandria. Their faces were the same. Their dresses were the same, only infinitely more ragged and scanty. They were grimed with dirt and crawling with vermin. They were extraordinarily squalid. They were not in the least like the illustrations of stories about the Foreign Legion. The corporal of the advanced guard was searching them for arms. They produced a curious collection from the family bundle—an empty jam tin, a lot of rags, about a cupful of grain tied up in a piece of blue cotton and a large flat wooden dish. These treasures they did not attempt to reclaim, but left them lying on the ground, thinking probably that now they had met the British army their wants would be cared for.

They tried to fawn on Vereker as he approached, but he recoiled with repulsion. Then he felt a shudder of horror. These people were *starving*. He had never seen

starving people before. He had no idea the human frame contained so many pointed bones. A baby's leg sticking out of a bundle on a woman's back looked like a slender brown stick. He fed them with biscuits and felt rather inadequate. He did not know what to do with them. His orders were to bring them back to camp. He could not leave them and pick them up on his way back for fear of their escaping. He did not think it quite safe to leave them behind or send them back, with a small guard. A strong guard would weaken his own party too much. If he took them with him he would have to go very slowly. He decided to take them with him, and leave the women and children to make their own way into camp.

Vereker turned to ride back to the main body of the patrol. As he rode it seemed that the oppressive silence of the place reasserted itself. The chaos of hills and gullies again seemed to be listening.

The excitement of dealing with what he believed to be tangible enemy had driven all this feeling away. Now that they had proved to be merely refugees it came back. He had not yet met the Unknown after all. He felt

terribly lonely and isolated again. Just this little patrol in the whole waste of desert.

The sergeant was looking a little anxious when Vereker reached him. "I'm not sure that we ought to go any further, sir," he said; "I saw several people dodging about on the top of that 'ill to the right there, sir. There might be any number of them in these wadis. And if we did get caught here it would be rather an awkward business getting out. They might easily cut us off. And then, if anybody did get 'it I don't know 'ow we should get 'im away. And you can't leave a wounded man to these Arabs." The sergeant too had been worried by the problem of the wounded, then. Vereker was glad of that. But he was very perplexed. He recognised that what the sergeant said was true. It *would* be an awkward business. He knew enough to see that. And had he any right to go against an experienced man like the sergeant? He tried to think impartially. After all perhaps it was only the spell of that silent waiting desert affecting them both. Then he remembered that if there was an enemy there it was his duty to find out who they were and how many there were. That

was a relief. He knew what he ought to do now.

“My orders are to go to the house, and I shall go to the house.” He was rather proud of that. He thought it was firm.

But still the solitude oppressed him as he rode. The prisoners walked in the middle of the party. They had been a relief at first because they seemed to show that the patrol was not alone in the world. Now the hills had swallowed them up too. The patrol and the prisoners were the only things in existence. The universe had been enlarged to the extent of half a dozen Bedouins. That was all.

Suddenly a roar behind. The patrol started and looked round. It was an armoured car. At a touch the spell of the hills fell away to nothing. Sane everyday life had returned. A motor-car and a smell of petrol! There were no enemy lurking in those dark wadis. The hills were quite ordinary hills. The camp was only ten miles away, and here was something that had come from it only half an hour since. The desert was no longer waiting and watching. It was just dull sand and stones. The car halted

when it reached Vereker. The patrol dismounted. There were questions about the prisoners. They photographed them. Vereker told the officer of the car how slow the prisoners walked. The officer took them up in the car. There was another roar and the car whirled off. It was going on another twenty miles. Vereker reflected how odd it was, and how ordinary everything had become. After all the car now could be of no use to him if he *was* attacked. It would be just as "awkward" as a quarter of an hour ago. The wadis were just as likely to contain concealed enemy. He began to wonder whether they would get back to camp in time for a bathe.

Two hours later he was sitting in one of the once awe-inspiring wadis on the return journey eating his lunch. The horses had their feed bags on. He could just see his sentries on the rise against the sky. He sighed rather sadly. He did not feel any more experienced than he had been that morning. The moustache had not grown. He was still rather plump and rosy.

SECOND-LIEUTENANT VEREKER

II. BEHIND THE BATTLE

THE little fortified outpost came suddenly into view of the marching columns with a shock of unexpected incongruity. They had left their camp three days before, and for three days had been marching through a deserted waste of rock and scrub, deep wadis, sunny yellow sand and desolate seashore, which seemed all the more deserted and forlorn by reason of the misty blueness of the sea. The endless waste gave the impression that not only all civilisation but all things human—almost all things of this world—had been left behind in the camp. In front it seemed nothing could lie but chaos, and then suddenly the outpost stood up from the flat scrub, a low sand hummock swarming like an anthill. Half an infantry battalion had gone on a week before, and had dug themselves in on the hill,

while in its shelter had sprung up with its usual swiftness an A.S.C. dump, like an enormous mushroom. The little hill covered in dug-outs and dotted with active figures gave a sudden relief to the strain of the unknown desert. It seemed somehow safe, comfortable, ordinary. The smoke from the cook's fires was already mounting straight in the evening air. There were two or three tents. It seemed as established in the middle of the waste as Knightsbridge barracks.

Vereker felt the relaxation of strain. He was sorry they were not going to camp at that comfortable-looking place. The clump of palm-trees, two miles further on, where the column was to halt, looked lonely in comparison. But he also had a vivid realisation that this outpost was at last the final stage on his journey to face the great enigma of war.

He had got tired of waiting in the camp expecting, against all reason, an imaginary enemy. He had begun to feel he never would see any fighting. The war would be over before he saw service. Coming to Egypt on the transport it had all seemed so near. But at the camp it had grown to seem further away than it had in England. He had felt

disappointed and rather foolish when he came back from his first patrol. There had been no enemy for a hundred miles round, and he had been expecting them round every turn of the road. Altogether war was a fraud. His face was still pink and white and chubby ; he hadn't grown a moustache. He had expected to feel a swarthy veteran by this time, but instead he didn't feel a day older than when he left England—not nearly so old as when he was first told he was to join the first regiment on the Western Frontier of Egypt.

But now everything was changed again. The column was definitely marching out to fight, and beyond this outpost was untrodden ground. A day's march, or perhaps two, would bring them into action. Once past this post the climax to which he had been journeying for a year and a half was certain. Perhaps by the day after to-morrow he would have had the unimaginable experience. The column trailed slowly on in a cloud of its own dust.

"The Colonel wishes to speak to you, sir." An orderly trotted up. Vereker hastily reviewed the past day for possible crimes and fell out. He couldn't think of anything he'd done. Perhaps the C.O. had found a man

without a nosebag, or with a Primus stove tied on to his saddle. The Colonel, looking very hot and dusty and fierce, was talking to the Brigade Major when Vereker came up. Perhaps the Brigadier had found somebody without a nosebag. Vereker began to review his past life. He saluted.

"Oh, Vereker, I'm afraid we shall have to leave you behind here to relieve a troop of the ——. Will you fall your troop out and go and report to Colonel ——— of the ———shires at that outpost we've just passed. I've seen your squadron leader."

"Very good, sir." So he was to be baffled again by this elusive Thing.

"I'm sorry, but you'll see plenty of fighting before you've finished."

"Yes, sir, I expect so. Shall I go back now?"

"Yes; we'll send you up some dixies from the camp. Let Major ——— know to-night if there's anything you want; you'll draw rations there."

"Very good, sir."

Vereker rode back to his troop feeling unutterably flat. He was not going to see anything after all. He was as far as ever

from the ranks of those who had been under fire. All the exciting picturesqueness had left the column. It was just a lot of hot and dusty men and horses. The post they had just passed was no longer attractive and comfortable. It was merely drab and dull and commonplace. It seemed to stand as the symbol of all the weary routine of the past year and a half—the clock-work-like eventless sameness of training. The sun was setting in a dreary cloud of dust. The desert seemed intolerably empty. And yet with all his disappointment Vereker was conscious of a certain relaxation of tension. He was no longer keyed up. Much as he desired the experience of coming under fire, he knew that it was an experience he would detest when it came. For the past three days his nerves had been strained up to meet an experience intensely hateful and intensely fascinating. Now he had all the relief as well as all the flatness of an anticlimax. The troop filed slowly in through the wire entanglement of the little camp and picketed their horses in the courtyard of an old native house which crowned the hill.

Vereker went off to report to the Colonel.

He found him just sitting down to dinner—of fresh meat—at a table. It all looked rather cheerful and clean after the dusty grubbiness of the three days' trekking. But Vereker didn't appreciate it. He got his orders. He was to find two cossack posts as soon as the column had left next day, one south and one west of the camp. He felt as if he had been finding cossack posts all his life. He remembered with a sense of injury how often he had found cossack posts during training. Now he was to go on with the everlasting routine of looking for an enemy that never came and never could come.

He went out to look at the camp. It seemed exactly like all the other camps that had ever been. There was a field hospital with its I.P. tents and flagstaff for clearing casualties from the column. There was the eternal A.S.C. mushroom of forage and bully beef boxes. There were a few camels with some dirty natives squatting in front of them. There were a few bell tents belonging to the Heads. There was the perimeter of trenches that would never be used with a swarm of infantrymen crawling in and out of them. There was the outer perimeter of barbed wire.

Anything more wearisome he had never seen in his life. He was bored to death. He felt at a loose end. As a happy thought he went down to the mushroom and indented for his next day's rations. That gave him a sense of importance and responsibility which was rather pleasant. But it soon passed away. He looked over to where the column was camped. It was dusk now and he could see the camp fires twinkling. He thought of what he would be feeling if he was over there only a day's march from it. But it would never be. He felt that this was final. He would never see any fighting now. They would go back soon to civilisation and the war would end and he would go back to England without ever having the experience he longed for and feared. He would just go on with drills and inspection and—cossack posts. It was very disappointing. What *did* it feel like. He decided the only thing to do was to go to bed. Next morning he woke up with a feeling of dullness. The future seemed to hold no interest. And then there were those infernal cossack posts to see to. He felt an intense resentment against O.C.'s who insisted on putting out useless posts.

He rode out with his little detachment about four miles south of the camp and planted his post on the top of a hill. It seemed exactly like all the other hills on which he had planted an endless vista of cossack posts in the past. It overlooked some six miles of flat desert to the south which was disgustingly similar to all the desert he had been seeing for months. It was an ideal place for a post. A sentry on the hill could see for miles in all directions. Just behind the hill was a deep wadi where the horses were completely hidden from anyone more than a hundred yards away. At the bottom of the wadi was a patch of incredibly green grass where the horses could graze and a spring where they could water. He felt a pride in it as if he himself were responsible for the accidental perfection of the position. He felt he would like the C.O. to see it. As soon as he had given his instructions to the corporal in charge of the post he rode away with the remaining four men to the Wells, where the column had bivouacked, west of which he was to place his second post. His own regiment had already left when he arrived. The main body of the column was just laboriously getting under way. Groups

of infantry lay about on the ground with their equipment already on. The guns were just moving out. A squadron of cavalry was standing about while the lines were taken up. The transport had just finished harnessing their mules. A crowd of ragged Bedouins had already taken possession of the bivouac and were eagerly searching for half empty tins of bully and other treasures. They clustered round the horse lines like vultures, squatting on the ground and sifting dust for any grains of barley that might have been spilt from the forage. Some of them used their hands, scooping up the sand and letting it fall for the wind to winnow ; others used the bottoms of old biscuit tins roughly perforated. They fought and gabbled over the little heaps of barley they had succeeded in collecting, like sparrows in a London street. One of them found an unopened tin of bully and the din was deafening. An infuriated infantryman, coatless, rushed up to one of the group : " 'Ere, one of you —s has got my tunic ; let's see inside them bundles." They gazed at him in dumb wonder for a moment. Then the babble broke out louder than before. He seized the bundles and

turned them out on the ground. They held an extraordinary collection of rubbish—empty tins, old rags, broken pots, wooden plates, bits of sacking. One of them contained an army blanket, and this was annexed in spite of shrill protests and wild gesticulations. But the tunic was not there, and the infantryman went off to search another group.

Vereker watched the emptying bivouac, and the column trailing away to the west. They were going to meet the Mystery which he felt he would now never solve. And yet they didn't look it somehow. They looked as ordinary as if they were in England and moving from one camp to another. There was no outward sign of that to which they were going. It seemed somehow incongruous. It seemed odd that he himself had belonged to that column only yesterday, and that if he were still in it he himself would be going out to the Great Experience. He turned away; he had still that infernal cossack post to station.

It took him some time to find a place which satisfied him, and when he reached the bivouac again on his return journey it was quite deserted. Even the Bedouins had gone; it looked unutterably desolate and squalid.

The ground was trampled and fouled. There was some paper blowing about. An empty barrel lay on its side ; the iron hooping of the compressed forage lay in a tangled heap. There were some bits of rope and a lot of old tins. An old puggaree fluttered from a tuft of scrub. Somebody had thrown away a cardigan jacket. There was not a human being in sight except one old Bedouin hag huddled up against the wall of a mud-hut and looking like a rag heap. Her face was so deeply wrinkled, and the wrinkles so well filled with dirt that she looked hardly human ; she was mumbling and mouthing over an empty tin of jam.

The whole place looked so grimy and disconsolate that Vereker felt an acute sense of relief when he got back to the cheerful bustle of the camp.

The day dragged horribly. It was too early even to eye the telephone hut for news. The column certainly couldn't come into action till to-morrow, probably not till the day after. He managed to distract his mind a little during the afternoon by putting up a saddle rack for his troop in the old courtyard where they were stabled. In the afternoon

he bathed. That time the day before he had hardly expected to be bathing on the morrow. It seemed impossible that in a week or two he would be back at the old camp without having seen anything.

The next morning was worse, but in the afternoon there was a mild excitement caused by the arrival of the Divisional train from M—— with supplies for the column. They came in looking very dusty and business-like, and they were as full of rumours as an egg is full of meat. The Germans had evacuated Belgium. Six hundred thousand Japanese had landed in Mesopotamia. The Senussi had made a detour and attacked Alexandria. The House of Commons had been blown up by a Zeppelin, and the brigade was going to France next month. This at least afforded food for conversation. Vereker went down to discuss it with the supply officer. “Of course, I don’t see why the Japanese *shouldn’t* have sent an army to Mesopotamia. There’s always *been* talk of using Japanese troops. It would be rather good if they had . . . I suppose it must be rot about the Germans. They’ve probably been driven back one hundred yards on a half-mile front. Still of course everyone

always *has* said they would collapse suddenly when they *did* collapse. If we had driven them back to the Rhine the war ought to be over this summer . . . I wonder if it's true about the Senussi. I always thought they might try and go round. . . . Do the Houses of Parliament a power of good if they *were* blown up."

The supply officer was rather unsympathetic. He was neither interested nor credulous.

"I don't seem to take any interest in that little affair in Europe now," he said; "even if the Germans *have* evacuated Belgium it won't help me to get up those five hundred bales of compressed forage from M—— by next Thursday."

The following day Vereker began to hang round the telephone hut in earnest. He began to wonder vaguely in what form the news would arrive. He unconsciously expected it clear, complete and final, like a newspaper article, with casualty lists attached. As a matter of fact nothing came through at all.

It was about half-past five that Vereker thought he heard a gun. Others heard it too.

"'Ear that gun, Alf?"

"Go on, that ain't a gun, it's those fellows playing football."

Vereker watched the football and listened again. It wasn't a football. The excitement began to spread. Men stopped in their work and stood about in listening groups. Why so late? Had we attacked? If so, why at 5.30 p.m. Surely *they* couldn't have attacked. It must be us. Was it a ship? Not likely. Too frequent. Ships hang about at long range and deliver a shell after mature consideration with all the importance of a judicial decision. This was mere indiscriminate popping. Subsidence of excitement as it is realised that nothing can possibly be heard till to-morrow. Vereker eyed the O.C. with reverence as being in possession of a telephone which connected with the column. If only he dared approach him and ask questions. However, to-morrow there will be news, as the wounded are to be brought back to the hospital in cars. The firing stopped. There seemed to be no further use in hanging about. Vereker went to bed feeling that he was under the shadow of great events. Next morning he woke with the pleasant sense that the day was going to be exciting. As soon as he was

dressed he hung about the O.C.'s tent hoping he would say good-morning. He did. Did he hear the guns last night? (Very tactful.)

"Yes. They were shelling our camp—probably to cover their retirement."

". . . Oh yes, they were driven back. We shall probably follow up to-day."

Does he think there will be any fighting to-day? No, from information received (dark smile) he thinks they have all legged it.

Vereker spent the day on hot bricks. At half-past six there was another sensation. A cloud of dust appeared to the west, and field-glasses at last made out a column of ambulance cars. The moment they pulled up outside the hospital tent there was a rush to surround "G.S. wound left hand slight," and similar cases. "Yes, they had been fighting to-day." "Pretty hot." "South Africans got in with the bayonet." "Did they stand?" "Yes, stuck hundreds of them." "Ran before South Africans got anywhere near them." "I was hit just before the charge, but I think they got right into them." "Hundreds of maxims." "Pretty severe losses—one platoon seventeen

killed." "South African losses seventeen killed." "I heard one platoon lost seventeen." "Major —, 'e said, 'Shot two of the devils.' " "Were they *really* getting it?" "Must have had heavy casualties. I counted five dead." "No, I don't know whether we got their guns or supplies." "Here's a Yeomanry officer, sir." "Were our fellows in it?" "Just going round to a flank after their camels when I was hit. Couldn't say whether they got there. Enfilade fire. One of your lot here—(with matches)—they were here and we were *here* on this ridge here, and their convoy was going away there——"

Vereker found a man of his own regiment with a broken shoulder, and gave him cigarettes. In return—"We were ambushed." Vereker doubted that.

Next morning Vereker eyed O.C. as a god. He must know *all* about the battle. He called, "Your fellows were ambushed, I can tell you that." "Did you get that on the telephone, sir?" (in an awed tone). "No, heard it from one of your fellows in hospital." Bah! Vereker began to disbelieve he *had* a telephone at all. All his faith in O.C. vanished since even he descended to walking the hospital in search

of rumours from garrulous and imaginative "G.S. wound slights."

Vereker was on tenterhooks till the next lot of wounded came in at mid-day. He badgered an A.S.C. lorry driver, back from the column in search of petrol, nearly out of his life. "Any more fighting to-day?" "Yes, cavalry and armoured cars still following them" (a lie). "Yeomanry got in with their swords yesterday. Yes; did a lot of damage. Killed their general."

Then comes the next lot of wounded.

"Yeomanry suffered awful casualties." "Suppose it was in the charge?" "Don't know." "Was there a charge?" "Yeomanry did awful well." "Senussi general a prisoner." (He was killed last time.) "Yeomanry went right through them twice." "Their second in command killed." (Probably the same man.) "Did the infantry get into them?" "Don't think so" (this from a yeoman), "they were four miles behind when I was hit." "When was that?" "About twelve." "They say the bayonet charge was at one." "Yeomanry lost thirty killed." "Total killed was thirty." "Six men charged him and then Bill's horse shied,

and the devil turned round and shot him in the leg." "You know, when we came into action over that ridge." "Patrol got up to ten yards of their camp, and heard Bury talking." "Think they must have been smashed." "Went away west to S——" "Legging it southwards with the cavalry after them."

Vereker was standing by an ambulance listening to all the rumours enthralled. Suddenly from the car against which he was leaning they lifted a stretcher case. The man had been hit in the stomach and was moaning monotonously. He was evidently still on the stretcher on which he had been picked up. It was soaked with blood, blood—and other things—lay in clots by his side. His face was deathly white with a two days' growth of beard on it. His clothes looked dirty and forlorn. Some one whispered he was dying.

Vereker turned away with a heart-sinking feeling of nausea. All the excitement and romance had gone from the scene; it was ghastly, horrible, squalid. This was the true War. This was the Reality, the news of which during the last twenty-four hours had been giving him the pleasurable excitement of

a thrilling story. He felt he didn't want to hear any more, life which contained these sort of things was not worth living. He could not get rid of a grisly thought. Suppose the man's mother could see him now. "My dearest Mother, I hope this finds you well as it leaves me at present." The words he had read so often kept repeating themselves in his head. Perhaps fellows in his own regiment, whom he knew well, might be in the same condition. Some of those familiar forms were now lying stiff and strange and masterless in some waste of desert. He felt he was nearer to war than he had yet been. But still the actual experience of it was as unimaginable as ever. He felt he might realise it more when he actually saw his regiment again, which had been through all that since he last saw them. He hardly felt he wanted to realise it now. It was so much more horrible than he had imagined.

He had a fresh shock the next day when two or three wandering Bedouins were brought in by his cossack post. Their rags were stained with blood, and they had various articles of army clothing in their bundles. It was obvious how they had been employing

themselves. It was horrible to think of these skinny, inhuman, vulturelike creatures clawing at the dead bodies of men he used to know—pulling the socks off their limp feet. He saw them clustering and chattering round the corpses, quarrelling over dead men's effects, as they had clustered and quarrelled round the deserted bivouac a few days before.

He had lost all interest now in the result of the battle. He knew vaguely that it had been a success, but that was all. All he cared about now were the casualty lists, and there seemed no chance of getting at them as the Yeomanry casualties had nearly all been evacuated straight back to M——.

He felt he would never hear them properly till he saw his regiment again, and he did not know when that would be. He began to think it might not be for months.

The captured natives obsessed him rather. He saw them again later squatting impassively in a corner of the camp eating army biscuits. He suddenly understood the psychology of massacre. And yet these were probably quite ordinary human beings with a desire for plunder and small delicacy of feeling. But their impassivity annoyed him; it was

aggravating that they should take it for *granted* that they would be safe and cared for once they fell into the hands of those whose dead they had been pillaging. And yet it gave him an odd thrill of pride too. There was not a soul in the camp who would not loudly proclaim that those ——s *ought* to be shot. No question would probably have been asked if they *had* been shot. And yet they were as safe as if they were in St. Paul's Cathedral. And they knew it. They probably thought their captors mad for not shooting them. That was what made Vereker proud.

That afternoon the O.C. came up to him.

"By the way, Vereker, your regiment's coming back to-morrow. They've just 'phoned back from the column."

"Oh, thank you, sir," Vereker had a feeling of resentment that the O.C. should have told him so carelessly. That which was of supreme importance to him he felt should be of equal moment to everybody else. "You've not heard anything of the casualties, I suppose, sir?"

"No; but I don't think your lot had many. The ——s caught it the worst."

That was a grain of comfort anyway,

Vereker spent most of the next day on the top of a hill watching for a cloud of dust. The desert seemed to stretch away interminably, intolerably empty. He felt as if nothing could ever come out of that void.

It was late afternoon when the cloud of dust appeared at last in the west, rising up to the setting sun. They could not be in camp for another hour. Vereker felt the wait intolerable. He wondered intensely what they would look like when they did arrive. Surely they would bear the stamp of what they had been through. They would look Different. The experience which he felt would make himself a changed man could not have left them without a mark; they would bring a whiff of war with them. It was impossible to go on watching that column crawling into camp. He went to his tent and tried to read. He would not look out for an hour. He was firmly resolved on that. His resolution held for three-quarters of an hour, and then he went out to look again. He found he had overjudged the time they would take. They had just reached their bivouac. The men had dismounted and the horse lines were just being put down.

Vereker hurried across and seized the first man he could find.

“Did you have many casualties?” he asked.

“No, sir; very few. I couldn’t rightly say just who they were. There were no officers hit, sir, I know that.”

Vereker felt a great weight off his mind. He could look round. He could examine these men who ought to look Different. They looked exactly the same as they always had. He saw one man with the back of his helmet torn away by a bullet, but the man didn’t seem conscious of it. He wore it as if it had been torn on a barbed wire fence. That was the only sign Vereker saw that they had been Under Fire since he last saw them.

He found an officer in his own squadron at last, very busy and not over talkative.

“Yes, we had quite a scrap. Very few casualties considering. Here, hurry up and get those heel pegs off, Sergeant Smith. No, we weren’t in the charge. We went round behind to get their transport. Captured any God’s amount of dates. Put two pegs in there between those sacks. No, I don’t think there was any one you know hit. Poor —— was

killed, but you didn't know him. He was in ——'s troop. Get your horses tied up now."

There was nothing here. Vereker still failed in his great effort to Visualise War. It was very disappointing. He had missed it again.

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III. UNDER FIRE

VEREKER lay on his back in his sleeping bag and stared up at the cold stars. To-morrow he would be fighting. He tried to realise this. He could not grasp that at last he was face to face with IT. The fearful and fascinating Thing over which he had wondered awefully as a child, the supreme experience which he had chased through the long months of training, the final crisis in which all would be changed, his manhood proved, and the whole face of life altered was now only twelve hours distant. Before the war IT had been to him a mystery, an unbelievable thing never to be actually experienced—a boy's dream of blood and steel—a youth's speculation on the emotion of fear.

With the headlines on that fateful August

evening, "English ultimatum to Germany," it took on a new aspect, it became a figure looming ahead—faint, distant, luring and repulsive. When he first applied for his commission he was conscious of being touched by the faint outer ripples of the whirlpool of which IT was the centre. Through the long monotonous weeks with the Reserve Regiment he had felt the dim shape coming closer—closer—but still impenetrably veiled—still utterly impossible to discern; sometimes the unveiling had seemed such an impossible thing that he had felt it never could be for him. At other times he felt on the verge—only another step.

Every throb of the transport's screw seemed to be carrying him nearer—not to Egypt, but to the Meeting—the final encounter with the spectre that had haunted him so long. It had struck him almost with the shock of disappointment that Alexandria was only an ordinary port of coal and cranes and shouting.

For weeks he had lain at the camp on the very verge constantly thinking the elusive moment had come only to be disappointed afresh. Now — it was to be to-morrow.

Vereker had a sudden almost nauseating wave not of fear but of sheer sudden anticipation of the Unknown. He began to try and picture it all—noise and shouting and blood, the fierce heroic men with bandaged heads waving bayonets and swords. He tried to imagine the men in his troop doing that. They didn't seem to fit into the picture—his sergeant, for instance, an extremely respectable-looking man with a yellow moustache. He supposed that under fire they would all be changed. How flesh and blood could stand it he didn't know. He supposed that would be changed too. There would be a sort of new form of intoxication which would alter everything. He would be exalted into a hitherto unknown ecstasy in which everything was possible. He had always comforted himself with that belief. He yawned again and had another more violent qualm. This time it was the most horrible fear of all—the fear of himself. Suppose, after all, he did not feel the intoxication—suppose he couldn't stand it—suppose in front of all his men he—the thought was too horrible to continue. After all, everybody *was* all right—nearly everybody. Yet he was afraid he mightn't be.

He tried to comfort himself by imagining the glory of succeeding—the confidence and admiration of his men—the approval of the other officers. He tried to picture himself in heroic situations. To-morrow night he would be a proved man — confident, assured, a veteran, one of the brotherhood of those to whom the Figure had unveiled—in the secret for ever. That was a delightful thought, unless, perhaps there would be no to-morrow night. He thought of death—more with sadness than with horror. Death was not yet represented for him as a lonely shrunken khaki figure stained with decay. It was merely oblivion and oblivion was not horrible. He was fond of the material things of life—running water and April woodlands, beer and grouse-moors and lighted restaurants. It was sad to think these things might never be for him again. He felt a resentment. Then he looked up at the stars and their distance and impassive infinity was immensely soothing. He felt aloof for a moment, seemed to see things in perspective and for a second saw all the turmoil and fighting and heartburn of war as an eddy of dust in the infinite.

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“ Half-past three, sir.”

Vereker woke up slowly feeling unutterably cold and flat, with sleep still yearning in every joint. There was a mutter already in the horse lines and he could see dark figures stirring. The feeds were already on. This gave Vereker a shiver of anticipation. They were drawing very close now. It was tomorrow. He crawled out of his sleeping bag and groped for his spurs with numb fingers. He felt both sticky and cold as a result of sleeping in his clothes and his teeth chattered—partly with excitement, partly with the raw wind. He felt about for his equipment. He would put everything on now. He would feel happier when he was completely ready, even though they were not to start for a good hour. He was too cold and excited to think now, but as he dressed he had sudden sinking qualms in the pit of his stomach almost amounting to nausea at the thought of the immensity of the day to come. He walked down to the horse lines feeling sick and empty and shivery. His voice was unnaturally calm.

As he returned to the end of the lines he was hailed by another officer.

"Hullo, Vereker, well you'll soon be in it now ; only about another three hours. We ought to find them soon after dawn."

Vereker had another qualm. This seemed to bring realisation. He yawned. The other officers of the squadron were standing in a little group where the bivouac had been, sipping hot tea and stamping about to keep warm, their greatcoats over their ears ; the servants were busy packing saddle-bags and rolling up blankets.

"Good morning, Vereker. Filthily cold, isn't it ? How do you like soldiering now ? You'll find some grape nuts and tea down by the fire."

Grape nuts ! It seemed the last touch of unreality to this impossible dream. Vereker had often tried to imagine war in juxtaposition with commonplace objects, but never with grape nuts. Grape nuts and a battle with Arabs in the Western Desert of Egypt. That was one experience gained anyway.

Vereker burnt himself with his tea. He must hurry and be entirely ready. He finished his breakfast and found he had ten minutes to wait still. He lit a cigarette. He felt that would pass away the time. When it

was finished it would be time to move. He smoked it furiously.

At the last he hurried his men out on parade and then had to wait stamping about on the dark sand in the cold winds and listening to the mutter and trample of the moving camp. Some infantry came past in fours. He realised with a shock of wonder that some of these men would never see another night. The order to mount came at last, but they only moved on a few hundred yards and halted again. Some more infantry came by and a squadron of cavalry at the trot. There was another long pause and then they moved another hundred yards, in another direction this time. Vereker felt this pottering about was going on for ever. He heard the rumble of the gun-carriages coming up behind him, and then at last he was on the move again. He had entered on the last stage of the journey to the Great Meeting. As he rode along his mind ceased to trouble him. It had reached a pitch of excitement at which it simply ceased to work. He came as near being conscious solely of the present second as it is possible for a man to come. Occasionally he would have sudden sharp stab~~s~~s of fear—of

himself—of death—of the unknown—sickening qualms which he would drive away with the same arguments he had used the night before. Then his mind would again relapse into a blank—a refusal to think of anything at all. He yawned. That was odd. He seemed to have been doing nothing but yawn that morning. He looked at his watch, the sun should be up soon and then—— He yawned again. A sudden wonder came to him. How would it all begin? The thought baffled him. He had always thought of being in the middle of it. This idea of a beginning perplexed him. When did everybody begin to look heroic? When did everything begin to look Different? At present the marching squadron was painfully familiar and commonplace. Did Hell open suddenly or slowly? He began to think of how field days opened. “Now, gentlemen, the enemy hold *that* ridge. Mr. Vereker, will you take your troop and occupy this knoll here?” Anyway there would be a definite moment. . . . It was light now, and the sun rose with smooth and visible movement from behind the rim of the dark hills. It seemed to Vereker that in that act it was majestically unfolding the scroll on which the Great Secret was written.

He realised with a thrill that now they were practically "in it." He felt that at any moment now a shell might suddenly burst over them. That was almost unbelievable. He could not picture this orderly squadron so exactly the same as he had so often seen it on parade, converted *next minute* into a pandemonium of wounded and struggling men and horses. He saw the range of hills where the enemy's position was not more than a mile and a half in front—silent, menacing, secretive. What mystery did they hold? He held his breath waiting for the crash of Hell opening.

His sergeant's voice from behind him startled him.

"Looks as if they'd seen something on in front there. They've 'altered."

Vereker looked ahead at the advanced screen—faint specks in the distance. They had certainly stopped moving. Had they dismounted for action? His heart gave a great leap. A moment later the column had stopped. Yes, they must have found them. And yet there was no firing.

The desert was still deathly quiet. The early morning sun cast long shadows on the ground. The horses fidgeted with their bits.

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It was nothing. Tap, tap; very faintly tap.

"They're into them," said the sergeant calmly.

Vereker could hardly believe his ears. Somewhere far in front men were firing at men. Vereker was "in it at last." The figure was unveiling. And yet this was a very disappointing beginning. The desert still and silent and sunny as usual. The squadron halted, looking as it looked any morning at parade—and in the distance nothing but that faint occasional tap—tap, tap. There was no experience *here*. Still, before long, he would approach it closer.

There was a rumble and a clatter in rear, and a section of the battery trotted up and got ready for action not twenty yards away from Vereker. He gathered up his reins and took a good grip of his horse. Even at the moment it struck him as incongruous that he should be thinking in the middle of a battle what his horse would do when a gun went off close to it. That was one of the unforeseen problems.

"Ssst!" Vereker, occupied with the guns, hardly wondered what that curious little hiss

had been. But the guns decided to take another position. Vereker glanced round at his sergeant.

"‘An over,’ sir, I expect." Vereker realised with a violent shock that it had been a bullet. "I think there’s some one ’it in rear too, sir," said the sergeant.

Vereker looked round. There did seem to be some confusion in the rear troop. An orderly galloped up.

"Major’s compliments, and will you send young ’Iggins round to the rear of the squadron, sir? ’Is brother’s been ’it."

"Badly?"

"Can’t say, sir." The orderly retired.

Vereker told Higgins to fall out. He felt this was all still like a field day. There had been an accident. But otherwise they hadn’t really come under fire yet. Nothing was changed.

Firing broke out heavily in front now. The earlier shots had merely been an affair of scouts. Now the infantry were advancing on the enemy’s main position. Vereker could see them on the brown slope of the hill opposite over a mile away—little slow-moving clumps of men at the base and rising from these like smoke from a fire thin wavy lines creeping up

to the crest. Suddenly the first line were visible for a second against the sky and then disappeared. Next instant Vereker heard a distant thud—a rising whine, and high in the air over the little clumps on the hill there appeared miraculously, and with startling suddenness in the blue sky, a little pure white lump of cotton wool, followed by the metallic clang of an explosion and the whirr of falling shrapnel. There was another thud and another whine and again miraculously it seemed as if a Titanic Colonel Chutney had attempted to play a golf ball out of a Gargantuan sand bunker. The explosion which followed down the wind seemed an adequate commentary on his failure. It seemed incredible that these manifestations were capable of tearing and smashing those little infantrymen on the hill. Vereker knew he had seen it now. But he had not achieved reality. This was no more real, no more capable of making one feel, than the moving picture shows or the illustrated papers. He was not even frightened. One is not frightened of a moving picture show. He could even see the stretcher bearers coming down the hill. But he could not realise they carried human men

with torn and mangled flesh. It was all seen through a glass. It was still a thing happening to other people. It was not a thing that could possibly happen to one's self.

What would his feelings be when that puff of smoke appeared over *his* head? He ran over his arguments again. Death was only an oblivion. A wound probably took one back to England. Success meant self-confidence, knowledge, admiration. They seemed so sound that he almost had a feeling of exaltation. Perhaps he wouldn't mind at all.

Suddenly came the order to move. Vereker's heart jumped into his mouth again. At last they were going THERE—on to that hill—where IT walked unveiled to be met face to face at last. But Vereker was baulked again. The squadron walked leisurely off to a gully about three hundred yards away on the right where it dismounted and sat down—as it seemed to Vereker—for all time. The men loosened their equipment and lay down; the horses browsed on the scrub; the sun beat down sleepily. The firing was very faint now. The infantry had captured the ridge and were driving the enemy back

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beyond the hills. Like all distant sounds it had a quality of peacefulness. Nothing could have been less suggestive of battle, murder and sudden death. The faint irregular tap, tap of the rifles and maxims was punctuated now and then by the deeper note of the guns. It was like a chorus of yapping terriers broken by the heavy bay of a hound. Tap, tap, tap, WOOF, tap, tap, tap, tap, woof, wouf. The sound rose and fell a little after the manner of a distant threshing machine on a hot afternoon.

Vereker lay with his back propped up against a hummock, and the sun soaked him and made him sleepy. A little yellow lizard ran over his boot. The horses rustled browsing; one of the men snored. The firing was inaudible now. There was not a sound in the hot still air.

This was not in the least what he had expected a battle to be. There ought to be noise and blood and shouting and people looking heroic. And here he was half asleep under a tuft of camel scrub. Yet he certainly was taking part in a battle. He couldn't say definitely that it hadn't begun for him yet. That was the annoying part of it. He didn't

feel as if anything had happened at all. Had he been under fire?

He had seen some people only about a mile away under fire. Did that count? How close did the things have to come to count as being under fire? Besides he had heard a bullet go by and a man had been wounded. Still he hadn't known it was a bullet till afterwards—then no more came. You could hardly count that any more than you could count being about in camp when a man had an accident with his revolver. No, he obviously hadn't been "under fire" yet. For one thing he had had no definite experience. Nothing had been changed. He had not felt that intoxication which was to make the whole thing possible. Everybody had looked as usual. He himself felt no different. There must be something more. The supreme moment was to come. And yet anything fresh could only be different in degree. *More* bullets.

He suddenly realised with almost a shock that the Great Mystery had lost half its content. He no longer felt that there was something unparalleled and unrealisable to be discovered. The Great Encounter had lost

half its promise. He felt that the face behind the veil, though still an unknown face, would not now be so very startling after all. He felt the figure was a stranger still. But he no longer felt it would be a strange being. He *had* changed since the morning, though he hardly knew it. War for him had now become part of reality. He felt he had lost something. Perhaps there would be nothing behind the veil after all. A sphinx without a secret. And yet there must *be* a moment. When would that moment come?

The order to feed brought Vereker to himself with a start. It was nearly mid-day. He watched his horse fed, and then went and foraged in his saddle bag. He was very hungry. He extracted a tin of sardines and some biscuits, a tin of bully and some chocolate, and went round to the back of his troop to lunch with another officer.

"Looks as if we're here for the remainder of the European contest," he said.

"Oh, I don't know. The O.C. was here just now and he said he thought they might try and break back this way after the infantry have routed them out of those hills. I

expect you'll see all you want to before you've finished."

They ate without talking. Vereker felt less imaginative after a tin of bully beef. The other broke the silence.

"There *is* a war on," he said, lighting his pipe. "Look at that fellow over there," he pointed to a fat corporal lying on his back with his mouth open and snoring to heaven. "You might photograph that and send it to the papers. Battle scene in Egypt. Come up to the top and have a look round."

They scrambled up the steep side of the wadi. Sandy grey scrub stretched away to the hill where Vereker had watched the shrapnel bursting that morning. It was silent now, but the hills in rear looked somehow pregnant and menacing. Somewhere behind that screen men were fighting and dying. They could hear the endless tap, tap, tap, wouf, tap, tap again now. Far away on the right was the dazzling white of the beach, the dazzling blue of the sea and a few little clear-cut palm-trees, seeming almost too bright and vivid for reality. But the brown hills seemed to dominate even that wonderful colouring. A body of horsemen moved swiftly

along a distant ridge, dark against the sky, and disappeared. Vereker felt mystery was returning.

"Nothing much to see here," said his companion, and turned away. They went back to the horses and Vereker lay on his back and smoked himself into a coma. The sun had mastered him again. It was very breathless in that wadi. The war seemed rather distant. He had missed it again. Soon he would be going back to the camp and bed and hot food.

When the order came to move he was conscious only of resentment at having to rouse himself from his comfortable torpor. He fiercely desired the war to be over that he might have his sleep out. Then he realised that at last the moment *had* come. He was going into action at last. His brain was too excited to think. It remained, as he rode, in a state of suspended animation. It was just waiting. They were going fast, moreover, over rough ground and his whole attention was concentrated on keeping his troop behind him and his horse under him. He was dimly aware that the sound of firing was growing louder.

Some three miles further on they found

the other two squadrons halted in another wadi. The sound of firing on the left was quite loud now, but Vereker still felt it was rather disconnected from himself. Suddenly, with a scream and a crash, a shell burst over the squadron on the right about two hundred and fifty yards from Vereker. He could just see some horses go down. With a horrible feeling of tension Vereker began feverishly wondering when and where the next one would come. He tautened every nerve to meet it.

How would it affect him? He felt his ground slipping away from him. It was so horribly *violent*. When would it come and where? It came just as he made up his mind there would be no more. He heard the scream coming. Was it coming right up to him this time? He wanted to duck and knew he mustn't—the scream rose intolerably and burst with demoniacal viciousness in the air not fifty yards in front of him, thudding up a cloud of dust on the ground below. Vereker had a sensation of sickening shock. His first horrible thought was that he was a failure. He had suffered in those few seconds the ultimate quality of pure fear. His whole elaborate edifice of argument had disappeared

at a touch. This was a purely physical sensation he had experienced. No amount of argument could touch it. It was the most violent emotion he had ever had in his life. And then he realised with dull curiosity that his emotion, intensely strong as it was, was not an active force. It did not—like most emotion—have a direct influence on action corresponding with its strength. True it did produce a vague desire to run away or hide under his horse. But the desire was so weak and childish that there was never any doubt of his power to control it. There seemed an invisible barrier between this emotion and action. Had there been cover to take, and had he been at liberty to take it, he would have taken it frenziedly. But he knew this horrible emotion would never prevent his doing anything he intended to. The only danger was that the emotion was so horrible that he would probably avoid making up his mind to do things which involved the suffering of it if they could be avoided. That, he could see, was the reason why men who were brave enough to face fire were not all brave enough to win the V.C. So quickly does the mind work that all this flashed through his brain

within two seconds of the shell bursting. He even had time to wonder that the forces which kept him in the saddle and kept his voice steady, and his face expressionless—the forces of tradition and character—should seem at the moment so weak, while the emotion which seemed so predominatingly strong should be so powerless to affect him.

Then he began to wonder again where the next shell would come. The thought that one of those rending, tearing things might burst next minute at his very ear—on him—perhaps—was sickeningly vivid. If only they could move! There was no third shell. They began to advance afresh. Even through his expectation of another shell Vereker began to wonder again if now at last he had been under fire. After all there were only two shells and they both burst some way off. He felt that nothing much had happened. He had merely experienced the emotion of fear. This wasn't war. This wasn't the mystery. Every thing had been ordinary and had looked the same as other days. Nothing was changed. It was no more of an experience than a street accident. And yet what more was there?

They were walking now, and Vereker became aware of sudden little spurts of sand about a hundred yards in front. In another minute they would be passing over that spot. It was a nasty thought though not paralysing like those shells. Again he was conscious that his emotion had no power to make him avoid that patch of sand. The moment was not yet, however, for the spurts had stopped before they reached the place.

They dismounted at the foot of a ridge, and again Vereker felt that at last he was to enter the new world. He was given to understand that they were to strengthen the right flank against a possible attempt of the enemy to break back ; but when he reached the top, he found that that particular part of the line was not under fire yet after all. He and his troop lay down in extended order just below the crest, as they had so often done on field days, and stared out over the hot undulating scrub. There was nothing to see ; only on the left the firing was loud and close. The line wriggled away to right and left behind the crest as far as Vereker could see.

Some way away on a little hill he could see two or three stretcher parties. Somebody

said the ——shires were catching it rather hot. What was it like to catch it rather hot? He still felt he hadn't really been under fire yet. All that was happening in another part of the line. He stared through his glasses again. He could just see on the distant horizon two or three dim figures moving. It was difficult to believe they were men. His squadron leader crawled up to him. "Try those fellows over there with five rounds," he said, "about two thousand yards, I think." Vereker gave the fire order mechanically. It was quite incredible that he was directing fire at real live men. The firing seemed to attract the attention of the enemy. Vereker heard that sudden ssst again, ssst, and then several together, ssst, ssst, ssst.

"Pass the word down for the stretcher-bearer, there's a man hit in the fourth troop." Vereker had the old feeling that this was another accident. It was no more strange than a man fainting on a field day. Not that this was like a field day. On a field day you did not have that horrible feeling that had first been given him by the shell, and which still persisted—that tension of the nerves—the sickening apprehension—suppose one of

those hissing things crashed into the middle of your face.

“Damn those stretcher bearers,” a voice was getting angry on the left, “pass the word down for them to hurry up.”

This was just ordinary men doing things in the usual way. Again Vereker felt the want of something.

The bullets were coming over pretty thick now. One crashed into the sand near Vereker's shoulder. It hardly even made him jump. His nerves were already braced as taut as they would go. He listened to his own voice giving fire orders in an almost unbelievably calm and steady tone. It seemed to belong to somebody else. Was this to be the sum total of the heroic blood-stirring deeds he had dreamed of—just to keep his voice steady?

“Can I go back, sir? I've just been 'it in the 'and.”

The man next him held up a bloody arm. Vereker was conscious of a vague feeling of annoyance. This was a man who was always falling out with some complaint. He had a ridiculous feeling that the man was shamming again.

“Yes, go back and get it dressed.” The

man scrambled up and went down the hill.

Vereker realised suddenly that he really was in it now. And yet where was the transfiguration, the lust of battle, the heroism, the mad self-forgetful whirl? Merely a lot of men had lain down on a hill and several had been injured. He had hardly seen the enemy, unless you could count those three distant figures. He didn't believe the fire he had been directing had done any material damage. The only thing he had experienced was that disgusting emotion given him by the shell, and even that was not particularly extraordinary.

Two or three more men were hit. To Vereker it seemed he was lying there through eternity—looking through his glasses or staring at the tufts of grass and pebbles under his face, and all the time loathing the army, the war, the enemy, his fellow-men and every second of his present existence with a virulence of hatred that he could not have believed possible. Once, feeling that he must do *something* to win his own self-respect, he had braced his courage and begun to stand up to get a better view; but a volley of abuse from

his squadron leader soon fetched him down again. He felt that the afternoon would never end. This was eternity. Two guns came up behind and began firing over their heads, Vereker had often heard how welcome was the sound of one's own guns, but he loathed these two almost as violently as he loathed the bullets which were hissing round him. The noise jarred his tautened nerves, and he didn't believe they could see anything to shoot at any more than he could. Besides they might evoke shells from the other side. He knew exactly what those poor devils on the horizon must be feeling about that scream and bang. He almost suffered for them by proxy.

The bullets began to thin at last. The enemy were withdrawing the way they had come. He could see two figures on the horizon again moving across his front. The guns limbered up and went away. Men began to stand up and look round. The sun was sinking towards the hills.

Vereker sought out the officer he had lunched with. They lit cigarettes.

"Looks as if it's over now," he said.

"Yes. They came over quite thick for a

bit, though, didn't they? We've had a fairish number of casualties. Poor Corporal Digs is done, I'm afraid. I suppose we shall go back to those wells now for the night."

"So I *have* been through it at last," thought Vereker. "I wonder if that's all." What he said was "I shan't be sorry for some of that porridge."

They were interrupted by the order to mount.

Coming down the hill Vereker had his first sight of a dead man. The body was lying on a stretcher, and the dead white face gave him a shock of nausea. It seemed horrible that an hour ago this had been an ordinary living man. It seemed rather ghastly that it should be wearing boots and puttees and uniform. The still form had an aspect too awesome and menacing. An hour before it had merely been a poor human body pitifully helpless against the death flying in the air. Now it seemed to embody those forces and mysteries which had destroyed it. It had passed into another world. It was no longer a human body. It was Death. Vereker felt almost as if this was the Figure itself.

Vereker mounted thoughtfully, and the

squadron moved off to the place selected for a camping ground.

It was growing dark now. The end of to-morrow had come. Had the figure of mystery unveiled at last? Vereker felt rather that it had disappeared. He certainly didn't feel any older or more assured. Perhaps that only came with long experience.

He had been under fire. But he didn't feel he had anything to show for it. "What did you feel like when you first came under fire?" He knew he could never answer that question. He wasn't quite sure when he first *had* come under fire. "I just felt very frightened." That seemed a poor answer. Had the great meeting really taken place? Had he solved the mystery? Or was there possibly something more. He didn't quite see how there could be.

His squadron leader rode up to his side—

"Well, Vereker, you've had your experience at last."

"Yes, I suppose I have, sir," Vereker answered.

THE PLAGUES OF EGYPT: ANCIENT AND MODERN

“**D**E mortuis nil nisi bonum.” I will not attempt at this distance of time to apportion the blame ; but there is no doubt about it that between them Moses and Pharaoh have a lot to answer for. They might have known that if you once flood a country with things like flies and frogs you can’t get rid of them again merely by being sorry. I do not suppose Moses minded much as he was leaving the country anyway, though it must have been a heavy weight on the conscience to have made an otherwise pleasant country almost uninhabitable. But Pharaoh at least ought to have known better. He had to go on living here, and, however hard his heart was, the flies alone should have brought him to his senses.

There is a popular theory among those who have never visited Egypt that the plagues

were quite temporary affairs. But I have never discovered any historical evidence for this, and, if anybody who holds this view will set himself down in the cultivation during the summer months to guard the cotton crop from the marauding Senussi, I can guarantee he will change his opinions. The only fault he will have to find with the original account is that it is far too bald. In the first place, it leaves out half the plagues. Moses and Pharaoh must have been bickering and plaguing each other in a small way long before they got seriously to work with the flies and frogs. In the second place, it is not nearly descriptive enough. The plague of darkness, for instance, leaves one with the impression of a mere eclipse of the sun. This does not sound very terrible. Nobody minds an eclipse of the sun much. It adds a mild excitement to the ordinary solar routine. The real plague of darkness is a much more unpleasant affair. During the summer the sun bakes the Nile mud with which the whole country is plastered into a fine black dust. Then the wind picks it up and whirls it about, black clouds so impenetrable that even if you could keep your eyes open you couldn't see five yards. On

inanimate objects, such as bread, fried eggs and clean shirts, it merely forms a thick black blanket ; on animate and perspiring objects, such as I, it reverts to its original form of mud, and trickles. The inhabitants are sharply divided into the school who whistle for wind and darkness and the school who whistle for calm and flies. Fortunately these schools do not clash much, because when there is no wind we all become converts to the wind school, and when there is a wind we all veer round to the fly school. Even the fly plague itself is not the simple matter one would imagine. Even in the daytime the house fly does not entirely rule the roost. There are, in addition, terrifying insects with the appearance of wasps viewed through a microscope. The men call them "Them blinkin' birds." They are very trying to the nerves. I am quite convinced that one bite from a bird would probably kill me. It is, therefore, a very tricky business when one comes into my tent. I am faced with the problem of conveying to the bird that there is in the tent a large and possibly dangerous creature (me) who had best be avoided ; and yet of not exciting its anger sufficiently to make it attack me. This

necessitates a constant exercise of delicate diplomacy which is very trying. It is in the evening, however, that one really appreciates the ingenuity of Moses' mind. The ball generally opens with a herd of enormous creatures with armour-plated bodies like lobsters, and great green eyes like boot buttons. Before I abandoned my evening meal as being altogether too nerve-racking, these creatures used to hang on the edge of the table in rows and peer at me while I fed. It was most embarrassing. When enraged they snap at you in passing like angry dogs. Following hot-foot on the lobsters come the tarantulas. I don't think they are real tarantulas. They are much worse than any tarantulas I ever heard of. They are naked and grey, and their bodies are about the size of a well-grown mouse. They have four complete jaws (instead of two like ordinary animals), which they grind incessantly. I shudder to think what would happen if one of them bit me. But it is during the hours of sleep that the plagues muster in full force. As one lies awake listening to the roaring of the frogs, large armies of ants, threading their way through the interstices between the browsing

mosquitoes and sand flies, pass and re-pass over one's body. The presence of the frogs has induced a prodigious number of frog-eating rats who do their best to keep me awake, while the frogs are taking breath. One in particular, who has been christened Philip after the small boy whose relations were always so anxious to see if he was able to behave himself at table, has apparently selected my tent as his dining-room. Every evening he imports the dead frogs which constitute his dinner and eats them noisily under my bed all night. Not content with that, he leaves the carcasses lying about on the floor when he has finished. His table manners are never too much to be deprecated. Next morning his traces are moodily followed up by the sanitary man and sprinkled with chloride of lime. The sanitary man has a theory that Philip dislikes chloride of lime. Personally I think that he regards it as a kind of sauce. The sanitary man's theory is only based on the fact that he himself, in common with all sanitary men, has become a pariah owing to the popular dislike of chloride of lime. This has embittered him on the subject of chloride of lime, and he thinks that

everybody (including rats) must dislike it as much as he does.

For a long time my sergeant ran a rival to Philip. We used to vie with each other in tales of atrocities committed by our own rats. His chief claim to superiority was the immense size of his rat. It grew to be as big as a cat. But I triumphed in the end. The day came when it was discovered that his rat wasn't a rat at all, but a tame rabbit belonging to the native proprietor of the canteen. This was altogether too much for the sergeant's dignity. A man may be kept awake by a rat without any loss of prestige. But no man can be kept awake by a tame rabbit and retain any shadow of self-respect. Next morning at about 3 a.m. there were horrible sounds of turmoil in the sergeant's hut, which culminated in the ejection of a limp black and white corpse. The sanitary man took it away next morning and put chloride of lime on it. The canteen man was terribly grieved. He said the rabbit was his only friend. But as he had twenty-seven similar friends in the canteen his statement seemed to me exaggerated. He also said the rabbit was a special rabbit which cost a lot of money. If all the other

twenty-seven were equally valuable he should be a rich man. It was noticeable that the intimate relations in which he stood to the rabbit did not prevent his wanting to eat it. I'm afraid he got no consolation and little sympathy. A man who can voluntarily add to the pests of the country by keeping tame rabbits deserves no pity. Besides, he had already forfeited all the sympathies of the men by trying to sell Flag cigarettes at a piastre and a half the packet. His name is Sardi, and he is both timorous and avaricious, which is an unfortunate combination in dealing with the men. I think they frighten him out of his life. Frequently during the evening I see a figure grasping a cash-box running round and round my tent. I could not understand it at first. But I subsequently found out that it was Sardi who had been terrified by some proposed fantastic outrage, and who had threatened to "go and tell officer." He never got as far as telling officer, because the men have told him that my hunting crop was specially bought for the purpose of dealing with boring canteen proprietors.

The canteen is a curious concern altogether. It has one acting, and, as far as I

can judge, about twenty sleeping partners. The acting partner (Sardi) does all the work, while the sleeping partners are apparently in the position of the bloated capitalists who put up the money. As there are only thirty men in the camp I cannot see how the canteen supports so many shareholders. Besides putting up the money, the only thing the sleeping partners apparently do is to come in small droves of an evening to sit in the canteen and, I suppose, "feel the market." Sometimes they actually sleep. They get on well with the men in spite of the language difficulty, but they seem to share Sardi's opinion that we are wild men slightly mad, who might at any minute do the most appalling things. The other evening about eight o'clock I heard a good deal of singing going on at the canteen, and then a sound of running feet and a crowd of natives rushed past my tent, tumbling over one another apparently in panic terror. I watched them out of sight in the moonlight going at breakneck speed for the village. One of them left his clothes on the barbed wire entanglement. I discovered afterwards that it had been a drove of the sleeping partners, headed by Sardi, with the cash-box. The

men had apparently sung them a little music-hall ditty, and then told them that that was the war-cry of the 2nd Troop which they sang when they charged the Senussi, and that whenever that song was sung the 2nd Troop must have BLOOD. Sardi had made one dive for the cash-box, and then stampeded with the rest. He did not return till nearly twelve o'clock next day, and only then with a very blanched face and many starts and alarms. The sleeping partners drifted back during the course of the next day, but the slightest symptoms of singing still made them very uneasy, and they edge towards the exit ready to bolt at the first note of the war-cry. One of them has not come back yet at all. He was a villainous-looking man, with one eye, who in addition to having a share in the canteen used to pay fifty piastres a month for the privilege of removing the refuse from our kitchen. How he managed to make ten shillings a month out of old bacon bones, I can't imagine. I think he relied chiefly on what he could steal by hanging about the cook-house and the mess hut, but about a week previous to the stampede I unwittingly put a stop to his chief source of profit. He had a

fracas with the cook over a matter of half a tin of milk which resulted in his nearly losing his one remaining eye. Not content with blackening his eye the enraged cook brought him before me by the scruff of his neck. He was so dishevelled that I did not recognise him as the Rubbish Contractor and forbade him the camp. During the ensuing week the bacon bones used to be passed out to him every evening through the barbed wire by Sardi. On the night of the stampede he had stolen into the camp in the hope of avoiding me, and I suppose he imagined that though blood in general was all that was *necessary*, *his* blood was that particularly aimed at. If he only knew it his absence has brought retribution on the war-criers, as we now have to have a fatigue party on every night to deal with the bacon bones.

The other sleeping partners have assuaged their fears a little by trying to conciliate me with presents of pigeon traps and grass for my horses. I think they now feel I shall stand between them and my troops' unholy lust for gore. But if they get many more rabbits in the canteen I shall be sorely tempted to hand them over to the men's mercies.

“GRUMBLES”

SCENE.—*A front line trench in Gallipoli. Four privates are sitting on the fire-step in the corner of a traverse. Each has in one hand a biscuit thickly spread with jam, in the other a mess tin full of tea. Between them is a pot of jam, lying in the bottom of the trench is a fifth soldier. They all wear cap comforters in lieu of helmets, which gives them a faintly piratical look.*

1st Private. It ain't right. Not any way you look at it.

2nd Private. Ah. Something ought to be done about it. It can't go on like this.

1st Private. Last night's the second time these last three days I've 'ad to carry them blinkin' rations. Up till three o'clock I was last night. 'Tain't right. A man's got to sleep sometime.

3rd Private. It's against King's Regulations too, they do say. One night in bed out of every three you must have.

4th Private. King's reggulations don't count for much out here, Bob. It ain't no good reading of 'em to them blighters when they gets above 'emselves.

3rd Private. Ah. Perhaps it would be better if they was paid more attention to.

1st Private (repetitively). Well, anyway something ought to be done about it.

2nd Private. And look at the weight. Why, if one was a 'orse one couldn't carry more.

3rd Private. And then the way one 'as to run over that open bit. Do you remember that night when old Bert was carrying the jam and I was just behind him and gives a whistle like a shell coming, and 'e runs and falls over a bit of barbed wire some one 'ad left there. Down 'e comes. Jam all over the field. Laugh!

4th Private. And when it ain't carrying rations it's diggin'. Me and 'im and 'im (indicating 2nd and 3rd privates) are on digging to-night. One thing about it, we can't 'ave to carry them rations.

1st Private. It ain't right.

(A salvo of shells suddenly bursts over the parapet. Fragments fall in the trench.)

They hurriedly shelter under the parapet. The second private drops his biscuit on the ground. Of course it falls face down. He regards it sourly.)

2nd Private. These blinkin' Turks. They always chooses meal-times to start that game. It's as if they did it on purpose.

1st Private (mechanically). Ah. Something ought to be *done* about it, I say.

3rd Private. What's our artillery doing? Letting them mess about with our tea like this. Waste of good food, I call it.

4th Private (to the man on the floor). I should get under the parapet if I were you, while this 'ate's on. Ain't you going to 'ave no tea? You might get hit there.

5th Private. I feel so ruddy rotten to-day, I don't care if I am 'it. I don't know what's the matter with me.

4th Private. 'Ave you been to the doctor? You don't look right.

5th Private (scornfully). Doctor! No. I ain't been to the doctor yet since I joined the army and I ain't going to begin now. Besides, what's the good? 'E'd only give me a number 9. And if I went again 'e'd give me a 'andful of 'em. I don't want to start

marbles at my time of life. If 'e didn't do that e'd send me to 'ospital, and a nice game that is. Lose all your kit and don't know when you'll get back again. Doctor! I'll be all right to-morrow, don't you worry.

3rd Private. Ah. That's right. I went to 'im with a ingrowing toenail when we was in England once and 'e gave me two number nines just to keep me quiet like. 'E put my toenail right for me though, I will say.

(Enter an Orderly Sergeant round the traverse.)

Orderly Sergeant. 'Awke! Is 'Awke 'ere? Ration fatigue to-night.

5th Private. What me? The ruddy rations. 'Ere, sergeant, ain't there something wrong? I was on the night afore last.

Sergeant. I can't help that. It's your turn to-night. It ain't my fault nor nobody else's. Somebody I got to fetch in or you wouldn't 'ave nothing to eat. You'd better complain to the Turks what made us so short 'anded.

2nd Private. Well, it ain't right not any way you look at it.

5th Private. . . .

1st Private. All right, Fred. Don't you worry. I'll go. You ain't feeling yourself.

5th Private. No, don't you do that, Alf. I'm all right. I didn't mean nothing, really.

1st Private. It ain't nothing. You can do mine some time. 'Ere, sergeant. I'll do it instead of Fred to-night. 'E ain't quite 'isself.

Sergeant. Oh, all right. I don't mind as long as I gets somebody. You was on last night, though. Well, come along, then.

(Exit Sergeant and 1st Private.)

1st Private (mumbling as he goes). That's three nights out of the last four. It ain't right. Something ought to be done about it.

2nd Private. Ah. There's something wrong somewhere.

DEFAULTERS

“ I ’M afraid I’ll ’ave to bring young Biggar up before you again, sir.”

The troop sergeant was apologetic. The troop officer sighed. He knew quite well what the trouble was before the sergeant told him. Biggar had been quarrelling with Corporal Cohen. Unless he was ill he did it bi-weekly. When the quarrel was serious and over a military matter, it was brought to the notice of Authority. When it was not, the troop officer either heard of it unofficially or deduced it from the faces of the combatants. The worst of it was that the troop officer, while compelled officially to side with the corporal, secretly sympathised with Biggar. He was entirely convinced that if *he* had been in Corporal Cohen’s section the quarrel would have been daily instead of bi-weekly. He rather admired Biggar’s self-control. Corporal Cohen was a little raj of

a man who should never have been in authority over any one. He was weak and fussy, and made the usual mistake of fussy men, in thinking authority must necessarily be overbearing. This, Biggar, who could have eaten him easily at a sitting, naturally resented. Biggar, the troop officer knew to be an excellent fellow. He was a big fair boy of nineteen or twenty, with rather dancing eyes. He was always frank about his misdeeds which, excepting his skirmishes with Corporal Cohen, were never serious; he was an excellent worker, and a keen soldier. It was all very annoying. Only last week there had been a regrettable incident with Corporal Cohen's kit bag. Biggar had been warned then, and this was very soon after.

"What's the trouble?" said the troop officer. "Corporal Cohen again, I suppose."

"Yes, sir. Will you see them now?"

The troop officer nodded sadly. He liked Biggar. Biggar and Cohen were produced with a clatter by the sergeant. They saluted.

"What's your complaint against Biggar, Corporal Cohen?"

"It was this morning at stables, sir. Biggar was cleaning 'is 'orse, and I came

along to look at it, and thought it was finished, and told 'im to get on with his saddle. 'E refused and was most insulting."

"What did he say?"

"He refused to do what I said, sir, and was most insulting. Called me names."

"What names?"

"Insulting names," said Corporal Cohen, finally.

"Well, Biggar, what have you got to say?"

The troop officer's sympathies were even more strongly with Biggar than ever. Cohen was the sort of man who loved to dazzle the eyes of Authority with bright steelwork. Things which were not capable of such a high polish, such as horses, for instance, took a second place. This was all very well as far as the Higher Command was concerned. But troop officers and sergeants have an uncomfortable habit of seeing behind bright metalwork. Biggar, on the other hand, made a god of his horse. His friends used to wonder why he did not take it to bed with him. And after all a horse is a much better god than a pair of shiny stirrup irons.

"Well, sir, I 'adn't finished my 'orse, and Corporal Cohen comes and tells me to do my

saddle. I told him I'd do it all right when I'd finished the 'orse."

"And what did he say?"

"He told me to do as I was told, sir."

"And you?"

"I said I wouldn't leave the 'orse for him nor nobody."

"He says you insulted him."

"I didn't call 'im no names, sir."

"Well, what did you say?"

Silence.

"What do you say he said, Corporal Cohen?"

"He insulted me, sir."

"You said that before."

"I only said, sir," said Biggar, with a burst, "that if he took more trouble with his own horse, perhaps he wouldn't get kicked off so often."

The troop officer nearly laughed. The catastrophe Biggar referred to had only happened once. But it had been very funny.

Corporal Cohen positively chattered with rage.

"And what about that lizard in my blanket?" he fumed at Biggar.

"What lizard in your blanket?" said Biggar truculently.

"It wasn't there when I last 'ad the blanket on. I know 'oo put it there."

"That will do," said the troop officer. He had decided to ignore the lizard question. It bristled with impossible and undignified complications.

"Biggar, it's quite obvious you refused to obey an order, and were very rude to an N.C.O. You've been warned over and over again. You'll have to go before the squadron leader. Dismiss."

"Oh. Corporal Cohen."

Corporal Cohen returned.

"In future never take a man off his horse. Keep your saddles clean, of course. But never take a man away from his horse. All right." Corporal Cohen departed crestfallen.

"Sergeant, I think you'd better take Biggar out of Corporal Cohen's section. Not just now. Wait till this business is over. Then do it quietly. Do you want me to see anybody else?"

"Yes, sir. There's that Waller again."

A look of sympathetic understanding passed between officer and sergeant. Waller

was one of those men who are a perpetual source of maddening annoyance to all those in authority over them. He was young and lanky. His members were abnormally large, and always seemed to be getting in his way. He always looked twisted even when standing at attention. He had a fair, straggly, tousled tangle on his upper lip. His face had a perennial expression of sullen and feeble defiance. His kit was always dirty and seldom complete. He had a knack of losing essential straps which one would have thought undetachable. These deficiencies he made up with string. He always tied his marching order on his saddle in the wrong way at the last moment. There was generally no time to put it right, and he consequently left a trail of possessions behind him wherever he went. He would appear at the end of a long field day without a nosebag. It dropped off, he said. It would transpire that he had tied it on to a cloak strap with a piece of string. It never occurred to him that the prescribed way of doing things was always the easiest and the most secure.

Nobody by fierceness or tact had ever succeeded in making him do any work. Some

N.C.O.'s he had driven to the verge of nervous collapse. He was always late for everything, and he always had a whining plausible excuse. One of the most irritating things about him was that he hardly ever openly transgressed. He never refused to obey an order. He never answered back. He had run through the whole gamut of regimental duties. The troop had tried to disgorge him in a hundred ways. He had been detailed to the sick horse lines (this was in England), but he was violently ejected by the veterinary officer, who had found him in bed at midday. He had been dropped into the brigade office, as into an *oubliette*. The brigade office had quietly and unostentatiously returned him with thanks.

In Cairo he had been inflicted on an unsuspecting Provost Marshal as a military policeman. But he himself had not cared for this work, and he had returned sick.

He had been spued up in turn by the cyclists, the signallers, the farriers, the machine gun section, the transport and even by that grubby and easy-going body, the sanitary squad. Each time he had returned to the now almost frenzied troop. In spite of his

wide military experience he remained unchanged.

"Well," said the troop officer. "What's he been doing now?"

"'E began by being late for stables this morning, sir. Said 'e'd lost a bootlace or something. So I put 'im on to sweep out the rooms and clean up the washhouse. Of course when the Major came round it wasn't done. So I told him I'd bring him up before you."

"All right. Bring him."

Waller was produced. He saluted awkwardly and subsided on to one leg.

"Stand up to attention."

Waller stood up under protest. He looked more twisted than ever this morning. Somehow his face was twisted. His mouth and nose seemed to point in different directions, as if he had not the moral fibre strong enough to keep them in position.

"You were late for stables this morning. You were also told to sweep out the rooms and clean the washhouse. You didn't do it. Have you any explanation?"

Waller sniffed. His eyes were watery and feeble.

"I couldn't 'elp it, sir. I couldn't find my bootlace, sir. It was Biggar, sir. I'm sure 'e took it, sir. I 'urried as much as I could, sir. And I 'adn't time to do the rooms, sir. I only 'ad five minutes to get my breakfast as it was, sir. Corporal Brewer 'e was on to me all morning about my saddle, and I 'ad to take their breakfast across to the guard. And then I 'ad all my stuff to clean. It ain't fair, sir. Everybody's down on me, sir. I 'ave to do all the work and I never 'ave a moment to myself. The N.C.O.'s of this troop ain't just, sir."

"That will do. You will go before the Major. And I shall recommend him to deal severely with you. You're a constant source of trouble."

"It ain't right, sir, it——"

"That will do. Don't make things worse by arguing. Dismiss."

Waller slouched out.

Outside there sounded a threatening voice.

"What do you mean by telling the officer I took your bootlace? I'll bootlace you."

Then a whine. "I didn't know you 'adn't took it. I see you with a bootlace, and I thought . . ."

The troop officer left the barrack rooms hastily.

The sergeant followed him. "Beg pardon, sir, but we're to find a servant for an officer wots going to Gallipoli. General's staff or something. I thought perhaps——" He paused. He knew the iniquity of the proposal he was about to make. He knew his troop officer to be a villain, but he didn't quite know how villainous. Waller was more of a trial to the sergeant than the officer.

The troop officer had a qualm of conscience. He thought of an innocent staff officer, perhaps somebody like an interpreter, going to Gallipoli with Waller. But his conscience was well trained.

"Well?" he said.

"I thought perhaps Waller, sir," said the sergeant guiltily.

There was a pause. Then "All right," said the troop officer. They avoided each other's eyes. "Good morning." "Good morning, sir." The sergeant saluted and withdrew. There was a happy light in his eyes. It would be difficult to spue up Waller right back across the Mediterranean.

* * * *

It was seven months before the troop officer saw Waller again. Then it was in the Western desert, and a good deal had happened in between.

One of the squadrons had just come back to camp after a fruitless track in search of an elusive body of the enemy.

Waller was standing in the horse lines. He had two stripes on his arm. The troop officer (now in another squadron), thought it was the sun. He strolled up to investigate. Was it Waller? Yes, it must be. That twisted mouth and nose were unmistakable. But they were changed. Before, the twist had seemed merely due to Waller's inability to keep his features in their right place. Now it was aggressive. "You give me any of your sauce," it seemed to say, "and *this* is what I'll do to you." His eyes had altered too. They no longer seemed to glisten. His limbs too, no longer seemed to be in his way. His hands looked competent and certain. He had filled out a lot.

His whole expression of face and body was one of unassertive pride, stoicism, adequacy.

As the officer approached Waller was speaking.

“Get on with your 'orse, Crash. Don't stand there looking at it. Good Lord, I could do two 'orses while you're thinking about it. *Move.*” Crash moved.

The troop officer smiled as if he remembered something.

“How are you, Corporal Waller? I haven't seen you for a long time.”

“Very well, thank you, sir. You're looking well, sir. Yes, it is the best part of seven months since we were in those Citadel Barracks.”

“Where have you been all this time?”

“Well, sir, if you recollect, I went out to the peninsula as servant to Captain ——. I was with 'im all the time there. I never got into the trenches there, we were on the beach all the while. We used to get a tidy few shells though at times. After that we went to Salonika, and Captain —— was taken ill and went home, so I took on with another officer who wanted a servant, and after a bit he went back to his regiment, the —— and took me with him.”

“Did you see much fighting?”

“A fair amount, sir. Then my officer 'e

was 'it, and I 'ad orders to rejoin my regiment in Egypt."

"Were you with him when he was hit?"

"Yes, sir. We were out patrolling, and ran into some of 'em suddenly. I had a tidy job getting 'im away. 'E wasn't 'arf a weight."

"You carried him back?"

"Yes, sir. 'Ad to."

"Did you ever come across Biggar out there? You remember him? He got made a corporal. We had to send some N.C.O.'s to Salonika from the Peninsula and we sent him."

"Yes, I remember him well, sir. He was killed, poor chap. I 'eard about it. It was a shell. Blew 'im clean up."

A wave of remembrance swept over the troop officer. He was in his dug-out in Gallipoli censoring letters. He remembered the sun and the hot flies and the sand trickling down his back. One letter—it was Biggar's—had set up a train of thought in his mind. It was quite an ordinary letter. Hoping his sister had got the scarf he had sent her from Cairo. Inquiring after a black cow he had given his brother just before he left.

He remembered feeling that these little

webs of human relationship, these small, ordinary pleasures and affections of small ordinary people were the most valuable things on earth. Nothing else—nationalities, powers and constitutions could compare with them. Nothing could justify their destruction.

He felt a sense of rage at the shells which were ruthlessly breaking into and smashing these weak little human complexes which centred on each individual man. Besides, Biggar had been such a capital fellow in spite of his quarrels with Corporal Cohen. Just the man who would have made a good sergeant. And now he was dead. The troop officer looked at the new and amazing edition of Waller and he thought of the black cow. It seemed to him that here was the whole problem of the war.

THE UNSATISFACTORY HERO

CORPORAL HOWARD had lost the confidence of his men. It was not so much that he had ever displayed cowardice as that he had never displayed bravery. He had been given many dangerous things to do, and had done them. But he had never done anything of the kind voluntarily. In the big attack, when the officer and troop sergeant had both gone down and he should have taken command, he was not in evidence; another man had taken his place. He had never volunteered for any of the dangerous patrols or bombing parties. He was a puzzle to his officers. They knew he had never actually panicked, had never actually refused duty, but they also felt that he would never do anything dangerous if he could possibly get out of it. His men had not actually come to despise him, but they lost

their respect for him. His friends had cooled to him.

Had he been an officer the tradition of his position would probably have kept him going. Had he been a private his conduct would probably never have been noticed.

The whole business had recently culminated, as it were, in a little incident which was in itself of not much importance. The Turks had opened rapid fire on the trench one evening, accompanied by machine guns and shrapnel.

It was one of those useless and unaccountable demonstrations in which the Turks frequently indulged, but it was thought that it might be the preliminary to an attack. The bullets swished over the parapet like a jet of water from a fire-hose. Half a dozen bullets from a machine gun would thud into a sandbag, kicking up a small cloud of dust. One man's bayonet showing out of the trench was snapped clean in half. The men sheltered under the parapet, and no damage was done.

An officer had come into Corporal Howard's traverse. "Can you see anything moving?" he said, and made to look over the top. Corporal Howard was crouching under the

parapet. "For God's sake don't look over there, sir," he said. "They've got a machine gun going, and it's certain death." The officer had mumbled "Fiddlesticks," and taken a good look round with his glasses. The men laughed a little, and Howard turned hot with shame. Howard felt his position now more than was really necessary. He was an extremely vain man, and it was his vanity, his desire to be looked up to by his fellows, that had spurred him on to win his stripes during training. It had, in fact, been the motive behind all his life. He was a good athlete and had taken trouble to excel merely in order to gain the admiration which athletic success excites. He was a good-looking man, and he found the admiration of women even sweeter than that of men. He had always relied on his vanity, been confident that it would carry him through any situation with success. Before he came to Gallipoli he had pictured himself doing gallant things. He had revelled in the applause he would win. The first shell that came near him had given him a worse shock than that of physical fear. He realised that his vanity had given way. That which he had hitherto relied on to carry

him through unpleasant situations he suddenly found a broken reed. He felt adrift—helpless. True, it was still strong enough to prevent him actively disgracing himself. But he knew it would do no more than keep him on the borderline. He had tried to prick it into activity. But every time it faced him with the answer, "If you are killed, as you probably will be, what good will applause be to you then? Do not risk it." He realised bitterly that only by risking all could he win all. He was miserably unhappy. He had fancied himself returning home confident, consciously superior to others, having proved himself. Now he had had his experience, and he was less confident than he had been before. He had not risked the final test.

He had tried to brace himself with other thoughts. He thought of death, and he now disliked life so much that the thought of final oblivion was welcome to him. After all, a shell could only kill or wound. If it wounded, there was a straight path back to a decent life. If it killed, there was only oblivion. But these arguments did not, he found, affect the purely physical quality of his fear. Besides, the longer he suffered the misery of his

present life the greater grew his craving for his old life. The physical comforts, the safety, the freedom, the clean clothes, the good food, and the admiring women. He could not make up his mind to give up these for ever. Death would give him release. But it would also take away all this that he violently longed for.

Then he tried to work up some enthusiasm for the cause in which he was fighting. It was his vanity that had made him join the army, but he had also been distinctly conscious of a desire to defend his honour. He thought of the happenings in Belgium, and tried to picture them in his own village. But he found the idea of them even in Belgium was unreal to him. In his own village they were frankly impossible. England to him was represented by a farmhouse in an orchard, a little stream where he used to fish as a boy ; bare, hilly, brown fields—the comfortable smell of the quiet little “ Coach and Horses ” in the evening—hot Sunday afternoons walking along the river-side with his love of the moment—cloth clothes and the smell of camphor. The thought that he was fighting for all this inspired him a little. But he

was too self-centred for it to inspire him much.

All this struggling and thinking had been done in his first few days on the Peninsula. Now he had sunk into hopelessness and self-contempt. He thought (quite wrongly) he saw derision in the eyes of all, and he avoided every one. He was uncertain, diffident. As a matter of fact nobody thought much about him at all. They did not consider him a good leader. But as long as a man does not actively disgrace himself there is a wide tolerance in the trenches. Every one is very occupied with his own affairs.

Two days after the little episode in the traverse Corporal Howard noticed a stir along the trench to his right just after the morning stand-to. He walked along to find out what was the matter. There was a little group of men talking in a shocked undertone at the opening of a new sap that was being driven out of the main trench.

"It's young Fred Whitmore. He would try and crawl out to get the rifle off that Turk they shot crawling up to the trenches last night. Of course they got 'im straight away. He always was reckless. He's not dead yet,

but nobody ain't allowed out. They've got a machine gun trained on 'im. We're trying to build out to 'im with sandbags now. He's only ten yards beyond the end of the sap." Corporal Howard pushed his way to the end of the sap feeling rather dazed. He had been fond of young Whitmore. They came from the same village, and the bond between them in the old days had been Whitmore's admiration for Howard. Now, Whitmore had been the only one who had stuck to Howard and whose presence Howard could tolerate.

Whitmore was one of those who have no realisation of danger whatever. So much was this so that he assumed Howard, and, indeed, everybody was the same as himself. He took Howard's bravery for granted, and this was balm to Howard's sore wounds. Howard reached the end of the sap and looked over. He saw Whitmore's body sprawled face downwards on the ground. It was moving a little, and there was a low continuous moaning. The ten yards in between seemed like an invisible barrier. Whitmore seemed to be suspended, as it were, in another world—in another dimension—brought close perhaps by a powerful telescope, to be seen and heard, but by no

possibility reached. An officer looked at him. "No one is to go out. They will reach him with the sandbags in a minute," he said sharply.

Howard felt a sudden frenzy seize him. It was intolerable that they should be standing there while Whitmore writhed and moaned ten yards away, alone. The apparent callousness of it made him catch his breath. He raged against those whose bullets had done this thing. Nothing mattered while Whitmore lay there. He could not contain his fury. He must beat them—*hurt* them. He was on the parapet before any one knew what he was doing.

He ran upright, reckless. Let them smash him, kill him. He laughed. He felt that by welcoming the bullets he was hitting and cowing the enemy. Beyond that he was conscious of nothing but a mad rush and a distant burst of firing. Something hit him violently on hand and shoulder as he tumbled back with Whitmore into the trench.

His frenzy passed, and he returned gradually to normality. He was wounded, and they were binding up his wounds. He felt little pain, and was conscious only of a great

amazement. For a few seconds he had been a man he had never known before. He could not think of it yet. He was too dazed. . . .

They carried him down the trenches to the dressing station. He would not think yet. He was just numb and rather sleepy. There would be plenty of time to think later. At the dressing station he realised with a jump that he was going away. He was going back to the farm—the physical comforts, the comfortable smell of the “Coach and Horses.” Unless—a horrible thought struck him—suppose now just as the cup of life was at his lips again, it were dashed away. Suppose death came to him *now*. He thought of all the stories he had heard of shells bursting over the dressing stations and killing men on the stretchers. He listened to the shells. One came rather close. He shuddered. He thought of asking the orderlies to move him to a safer place. He was the old Corporal Howard again. All day long his friends and officers came to see him. They congratulated him on his courage. His colonel made the usual remark that he deserved a V.C. and a court-martial. He did not care. He was

listening to the shells. He was on tenter-hooks. Would he get through that last day, would he pass that last bridge, would he come safely through that last journey to the hospital ship? In the evening they put him in a mule-cart and drove him down to the field ambulance on the beach. All through that journey he was in a fever of anxiety. He knew the road was often shelled. He could hardly restrain himself from jumping out and beating the mules, so slowly did they move. A man above him was crying for air. He died before they reached the beach.

They arrived. Corporal Howard slept the sleep of exhaustion, and next day was transferred to the hospital ship in a state of peaceful apathy. He would not think about things yet, he told himself. Once on board the ship he felt as if he had been miraculously transplanted to another world. On the Peninsula the world of peace had seemed a dream—unreal. The only reality had been the trenches and the mess and the shells. Now in the space of five minutes war had become an impossible dream. *This* was the ordinary—the only true reality, this sane atmosphere, these quiet nurses, the beds, the clean paint,

the electric lights. That is one of the great mysteries of war. The world of war and peace can never blend. Neither exists for the other.

Here at last was Howard's dream realised. He was wounded. He was, to all who had heard the story, a hero. And yet where was that feeling of confidence, of conceit, that luxurious sensation of having emerged from the ordeal a proved man? He felt just the same sense of uncertainty, of failure, of self-distrust, of unsatisfactoriness as he had felt a few days ago. He knew he had done a gallant action, but it had only been for a temporary and passing reason. There were two Howards. The Howard of the episode in the traverse and the Howard of the episode in the sap. Could he ever repeat the performance of the latter? He remembered his terror of the shell while he lay in the ambulance cart. Meanwhile here was the present moment, which should have been the best of his life, spoilt and embittered. He tried to think only of his performance of the previous morning. To see himself as a splendid fellow. But he could not. He worried himself with these thoughts all the way to Alexandria.

His nurses and doctors could not understand him. The wounded were generally so cheerful, and he was not in much pain.

He forgot himself a little when he arrived. The journey to the hospital interested him. It was jolly to see life again. The familiar smells of the native quarter—of drains, of garlic, and of fried butter seemed almost like home to him. He had a little shock of surprise to see people walking about in the open quite unconcerned, and to see careless faces unmarked by the consciousness of the constant nearness of the shadow of death. But in the hospital his troubles began again. Nurses and Red Cross visitors who had heard his story treated him as a hero. This was the most bitter thing he had yet suffered. How pleasant it would have been if he had felt it to be true! But he did not feel a hero. He knew he was still the same uncertain Howard of the traverse.

The flattery he received worked in his mind until he felt that life as it was for him then was absolutely intolerable. And with that climax came relief. He would go back and earn the admiration which he now felt he was getting under false pretences. He

had been a brave man for eighty seconds under violent stress. Now that he realised that life without self-respect was unbearable he felt he could be permanently brave. Death was better than his present condition. Now that he realised that he began to feel sure of himself again. He was eager for the future. He would refuse to go back to England on sick leave. In a few months now he would have won.

The doctors' information that his left arm was permanently injured and that he would have to leave the army dazed him. He was conscious at first of a faint jump of relief and wonder that life was now a certainty for him, then he realised gradually that now he would never be able to put himself to the trial. It did not bring back the whole of his old misery. During the last few weeks he had been utterly confident that when the test came again he could face it; and now that he knew that the test could never come he did not return to his old feeling of self-distrust. But he could never be certain now. He could never know. Gradually his mind began to revolve round and round the problem which of the two Howards would he ultimately have proved

himself to be. He thought of his moment of gallantry. He thought how intolerably life had seemed when he believed that moment could never be repeated, and how he had determined that death would be better than that belief. Then he remembered his fear as he rode down to the beach in the ambulance. He remembered that once before he had persuaded himself that death would be a relief from an intolerable life, and it had not availed him. Would that have happened again? Night and day his consciousness revolved round these pictures. But because of the firm confidence that had come to him in hospital he was not miserable as he had once been.

He was lionised when he got home. Men said he would have won the V.C. if he had not been disobeying orders. They gave a dinner in his honour at the little county town. There were the usual speeches. "Although he has given his left arm in the service of his King and to save the life of a friend, his one desire now is to return to serve his country once more."

Corporal Howard was lulled by the dinner,

the wine, and the lights. Already his mental turmoil had begun to subside. He was returning to the normal. Gallipoli and its problems seemed very distant. He smiled as he thought of the real reason for his desire to return.

“SEEING THINGS”

THE IMAGINATION OF PRIVATE RUNNETT

PRIVATE RUNNETT was deciding for about the hundredth time that Nature had never intended him to be a soldier. He was extremely cold and extremely jumpy. That was his chief reason for his decision about Nature.

Small parties of Arabs had developed a nasty habit of crawling up to the defences of the camp at night, loosing off their elephant guns at the lights and disappearing. They never did any damage, but they used to wake up the general's "A.D.C." Consequently, Private Runnett, with twelve other men and a sergeant, had been posted on a hummock of sand about half a mile outside the defences of the camp to intercept these attentions.

Private Runnett lay behind a rock and shivered. The night was so silent it seemed

the breathless silence of expectancy. Private Runnett felt that. There was no moon. His eyes strained to see just a little farther, and just a little farther yet, into the elusive darkness which seemed like a dark, faintly grey, and altogether baffling haze, which thickened into obscurity not more than twenty yards away.

All he could see was the twenty yards of sand which looked like dirty snow in the starlight, dotted with dark splotches which he knew to be tufts of desert scrub. They could crawl right up to you without you seeing them, he thought. Or they might come from behind. Suppose the sentry behind him was asleep. He had a nasty feeling down his spine. They could crawl up and "knife" you before the relief had time to wake up.

He tried to imagine what a knife would feel like in his back. Perhaps it would not touch a vital spot, and then he could lie there and pretend to be dead, and in the morning he would go to hospital. A dog barked in the desert. Private Runnett started. If only he could see the lights of the camp he would not feel so bad. He felt so isolated.

Perhaps there would be thirty or forty of

them. They might catch him alive. He knew what would happen then. But he would finish it with his bayonet. It was lucky there had been no order to fix owing to the glimmer. He loosened it in its scabbard. He would not mind that so much. It was those long knives and the white eyes in the brown faces which were crawling up behind him.

* * * * *

What was that! Just on the edge of his field of vision. Something dark—surely it moved. If only he could see just a little farther.

“Sergeant,” he whispered. “Isn’t that one of them there? Look!” The sergeant crawled up and peered over his shoulder. “Go on. You’re seein’ things. That’s only a bush.”

He must not be a fool, he thought.

Of course it was only a bush. The darkness round him seemed pregnant—teeming—waiting. What horror would it bring forth? A dreadful thought struck him. Suppose they attacked in force to-night. He would be between two fires. He pictured them—hundreds of them—dark shapes coming through the darkness, and when they got close, white

eyes in dark faces and long knives—and then machine-gun fire from the camp behind. He would lie behind this rock, and then, if they were driven back quickly, he might be passed over.

Or—he had a horrible thrill—supposing they took the camp. He wondered if he could make his way to Alexandria along the coast. This darkness was awful. If only there was a little noise somewhere. Suddenly he saw something move. He gave a great jump. “Sergeant,” he whispered again, “sergeant.” The sergeant crawled up behind him again, “Look, surely that’s one of ’em, isn’t it, sergeant?” The sergeant eyed him angrily. “It’s one of them dogs. You wake me again and I’ll sergeant you.”

He wondered if the sergeant thought him afraid. He was afraid. He was cold too. Lord, how cold he was! And there was a stone digging into his side. He had not noticed it before. And his left leg had gone to sleep. He moved it gingerly. He began to think of the general attack again. He had heard his officer instructed to make his way down to the sea in the event of an attack, and to come into camp along the beach.

He thought of that crawl down to the beach in silence—with dark figures all round. He wondered if they would get down to the beach before the camp opened fire. He pictured the last fifty yards—only fifty yards more—and then the fire opening and their all being mowed down.

Perhaps they might run into some more enemy on the beach. There would be a shout and white eyes in dark faces. Or suppose their own men opened fire on them as they tried to get into camp. He would shout to them in English, but he must not shout too far away or it would give him away to the enemy. He wondered what would be the best distance at which to shout. Or perhaps he could swim round—that was a good idea. Surely he must live to get through. He thought of the end of the war. Clean clothes and hot coffee and sausages for breakfast. Sausages ! He felt the ecstasy of that moment would be unendurable. Surely he could never achieve such happiness. Hot sausages ! . . .

* * * * *

Yes, there *was* one. His heart jumped and stopped. Then something began to work

quite coolly inside his brain. Horrible thoughts of death and darkness were still racing through his brain, but they were rushing through it so quickly now that there was no time to realise them. He was conscious that he must aim very carefully, steadily. He brought his rifle slowly up to his shoulder. He had a fleeting feeling of wonder.

Was this all the darkness had been pregnant with? This was not so bad. Firing broke out all round him. He fired again. Lord, how the flash blinded him! A bullet cracked into the sand by his side. He heard the sergeant's voice. "Come on," it said. "After them. This way." He jumped up and followed. Suddenly something moved near him, and he jumped back to find the muzzle of a gun about an inch from his face. He knocked it aside instinctively with his rifle and fell on the man, clutching him by the arms. They went down together, and Private Runnett found himself kneeling on his adversary. The man spat at him. Private Runnett drew his bayonet and poked at the man's face. The point slipped, and the man screamed and struggled. It flashed through Private Runnett's mind that he had never realised

before that there was bone behind a face. He poked again—harder this time—near the neck. The man coughed, and stopped struggling. Private Runnett stood up, trembling a little. "Lord," he said, "you did give me a start!" Then he ran on after his fellows.

The dawn was breaking when they returned, and they sat down on the hummock of sand and ate cold bully beef.

Private Runnett began to reflect again, and decided for the hundred and first time that Nature had not intended him to be a soldier. Suppose *he* had gone down underneath. He shuddered. He wondered what it felt like to have a bayonet slip across your face like a steel knife on a plate. It set his teeth on edge. And then that bullet that had gone so close. Suppose *he* was lying out there in the cold. He strolled across and looked at the man he had shot at. He was lying sprawled on his side with his face turned up in the grey light. The dull white of death was showing through the brown and the side of his face was smashed and sandy.

Somehow Private Runnett hitherto had unconsciously looked on the human face as

something that could not be smashed and tattered like other things. It was a shock to realise it was just like other stuff.

"Lord," said Private Runnett, "suppose *I* was lying like that!"

BERT

THE squadron galloped out to the flank in column of troops. For an hour they had waited nervously behind a hill, listening to the casual rattle of rifles and the eager chatter of machine guns in front as the infantry came into action—idly watching the compact companies of reserves in rear moving slowly across the vast open plain of sand, more like queer rippling monsters than bodies of individual men. Then suddenly dim figures dancing and fantastic in the mirage could be seen moving across the far horizon. The Arabs were attempting a flanking movement. The moment for cavalry action had come.

As Bert Porter rode he was conscious of little else but the necessity of keeping his horse from falling.

The going was very bad. Naturally soft, the ground under the recent rains had

developed the consistency of custard pudding. In places the gallop was hardly more than a walk, and the horses floundered up to their hocks. Every now and then Bert would feel his horse's quarters drop away from under him, and he would wonder whether it had been hit or whether it had only sunk into a soft patch of ground. The further they went the stronger he felt the absolute necessity of avoiding a fall. It beat in his brain like an obsession and drove out the consciousness of all else. If he fell now he would be left alone—miles from the infantry, miles from where the cavalry would dismount for action, at the mercy of any wandering Bedouins who happened to see him.

As he rode the mad whirl of the gallop and the obsessing necessity of keeping his horse going seemed to maze his brain like rushing water. He saw bullets crack into the sand in front of him. He saw horses and riders pitch headlong, and as he flashed past the struggling heap he would see for an instant sharp against the black of the horse's coat the dark red liquid mark of the bullet. But though he saw these things so vividly that he knew he would never afterwards

forget them, he was barely conscious of them. They set up no train of thought in his mind.

His horse came nearly to its knees. It was tiring. He *must* keep up.

Nevertheless floating at the back of his mind, but not allowed to enter his consciousness, was an anxiety. He knew that his brother Will was riding some two hundred yards in front of the squadron as ground scout. It was not a very dangerous post. His isolation made him something of a mark, but they were too far from the enemy, and riding too fast for marksmanship to be of much account. But Bert would have felt happier if his brother had been riding at his side. "Come up, you brute."

It all happened so suddenly that it seemed to pass through Bert's mind like a dream. He saw the troops in front reining in, looked up and saw the signal to dismount for action. Automatically he handed over his horse, dismounted, and ran out in front of the squadron. As he ran he was dimly conscious of shouting. "Halt, there! Halt!" He wondered vaguely what they went on shouting like that for after every one had halted. He saw the squadron leader and his trumpeter

galloping madly away from the squadron and shouting. And then, good heavens! it was Will! Bert realised it all in a flash. Will's horse had bolted. It always was a brute. He had often chaffed Will about not being able to hold it. Bert gazed at the retreating group. He made a half movement to return to his own horse, but instantly realised the futility of it. The squadron leader had turned now and was galloping back to his squadron. His trumpeter went on a little further, then also turned. The little figure beyond moved swiftly on into the shimmering distance, then, suddenly, seemed to collapse and disappear.

Bert lay on the sand under the burning sun, and his mind was numb. He pictured the scene over and over again. It seemed like a scene from a story—remote from reality—utterly disconnected from himself. And then suddenly the brutal actuality of it would stab him like a knife and next instant have faded again. He would never see Will again. These, too, were words without meaning.

Never only meant a long time—a very long time—and then in a horrible flash he

would see the bottomless abyss of Never. And again it would pass. He was vividly conscious of the little stones under his face as he lay. Then unreality asserted itself with a rush. The insistent sun; the vast flat plain of sand; the still khaki forms on either side of him; the dancing figures on the horizon which seemed to be hung in mid air by the mirage; the whizz of the bullets overhead, their crack as they hit the sand in front of him; the gallop, the fallen group of horse and rider with that sharp red mark on the horse's shoulder; the little lonely figure disappearing into the haze—it was all a dream. He saw a snail in front of him—several snails. That was odd. That snail was real—or nearly so. It was whiter than the truly real snails in England. But still it was real. Suddenly that snail became of portentous importance. It was the one solid rock of reality on which he could anchor in this rushing swirl of dreams. He tried to make his mind jump from the snail to Will. He tried to think what had happened to him. Somewhere in that vast plain was that familiar body, the arms, the face, the hands—perhaps mangled, but still there. That seemed incredible. He

remembered the fate of two men who had fallen into the hands of the Arabs and been afterwards found. The thought checked itself with its own horror.

The afternoon was sinking. The firing died away. Hardly a bullet came over now. Only the guns flicked shrapnel at the retreating enemy. Men stood up and stretched themselves; gathered in little groups, lit cigarettes and compared notes. The strain was over. There was a good deal of laughter. Bert stared round him dazed. For the first time reality came to him and stayed. Was this the end? Just this cessation of firing and those distant retreating shapes? A look of restlessness—of a want unsatisfied crept into his eyes. He sought his officer.

“May I go forward, sir, and look round a bit?” he said.

The officer thought a moment.

“Yes, don’t be long,” he said, then significantly: “The whole field will be searched, you know,” he added.

Bert went forward. They had advanced some way during the day’s fighting, and he had seen something about a quarter of a mile ahead. He walked up to it. It was Will’s

horse. There were several wounds in the body. A little trickle of blood ran from the corner of the mouth. The eyes were wide open and staring. There was nothing else. Saddle—bridle—all were gone. Bert wandered on, but he knew there was no hope of finding anything. He returned to the dead horse and stared down at it as it lay inert, still—inscrutable. A sudden frenzy of rage seized him. He kicked the dead body as it lay!

“You brute!” he said. “You brute!”

The body wobbled feebly like a jelly. Bert turned and walked back to the squadron. The look of restlessness, of a vague something unsatisfied was still in his eyes.

The night fell dismal and hopeless. It came on to rain, and the ground rapidly became a marsh. The transport was bogged several miles away, and the tired men had neither food nor drink. It was bitterly cold, and as the column had been travelling light that day the men had neither coats nor sleeping blankets. They sat round little fires made of desert scrub or tramped up and down in the slush and rain trying to keep warm. A few tried to sleep in the shelter of their

saddles, but woke up so numb and wet that they did not try again.

Bert wandered up and down all night. He could not rest. Was this the end? Once he stumbled over a dead man lying just as he had been left by the stretcher bearers. He could just see the waxen face staring up at the rainy sky. As a constant insistent background to his thoughts he was conscious of the restless trample and murmur of the horses in the lines who had not been fed for twenty-four hours. There was no finality about this.

Morning broke cold and grey. The little force was moving before it was light. Bodies of men formed up and trailed off across the desert—a long slow moving column. The men's spirits rose with the sun. They were going back to camp—to sleep, warmth, food, and water. At each halt hundreds of men fell out, scattered over the desert and lying at full length eagerly sucked up the clear water from the shallow puddles. Bert alone accepted the morning as he had accepted the night. It was a background. He was conscious of a gnawing restless desire—for what? He did not know himself for what.

Two months later the little column of cavalry moved slowly through the darkness of early morning. It was the last stage of their long journey. S——, the little frontier fort just beyond which for many years had been the main camp and headquarters of the enemy, was to be reached that day.

Bert felt unaccountably excited. He did not know why. Fighting did not excite him now. He had come to take it all in the day's work. The peculiar look had never left his eyes.

At dawn they came suddenly on the infantry column bivouacked on the side of a sandy hill, pink in the morning light.

The column halted and the men dismounted and lay on the ground idly smoking and playing with the pebbles in the sand. Rumour came down the ranks. "What is that? Evacuated S—— yesterday? All gone home? Blew up their powder factory at four o'clock."

The cavalry were to push on. Bert rode mile after mile, hour after hour, his mind lulled to blankness by the motion, the sun, and the sand. He felt that he would never satisfy

that gnawing now. He did not even know what it was he wanted.

At noon they reached their goal. A little inlet of the sea and round it a few wooden huts. A mile of rush-covered flat and back of that the stony precipitous hills from the top of which stretched away the great flat expanse of the Libyan desert. The hills just beyond the bay ran right down to the sea, and on the very point of them, a startlingly unexpected problem of civilisation in this vast waste of sand and rocks and gullies, stood the little dazzlingly white neat square fort of S——. The column halted, and for four hours the men lay under the driving sun sleeping or staring idly at the sand. This, then, was the end. Bert's body was almost glad. He was weary and thirsty. He slept a little, and felt he could lie there for ever.

At two o'clock came the order to move. The little column trotted quickly over the rush-covered flat. Painfully in single file they began the ascent of the hills. Up—everlastingly up. They were leading their horses now, stumbling, falling over rocks, slipping on sloping slabs of smooth stone, cursing, sweating and climbing. After half an hour

each man felt that this was eternity ; that he had all his life been pulling his horse up those endless slopes and that never in the future would he do anything but that again. And then at last as one by one they reached the top they saw the flat endless desert stretching away in the afternoon sun.

Another hour of monotonous riding. Bert did not know where they were going. He did not much care. Perhaps they were going to fight after all. He might be killed at the last. He felt it mattered to him very little. They passed the remains of a small Arab camp. There was a heap of empty snail shells. They reminded him vividly of that day of horror two months ago. He saw a dead Arab with his feet cut off lying beside a sewing machine and a primus stove. The horror of it never struck him at all. He merely wondered curiously at the bizarre juxtaposition of those incongruous objects with a dead body in such a place as this.

At four o'clock they reached the Arab camp. It was deserted. Singly and in clusters the flat black Bedouin tents, scarcely higher than a man's waist, were scattered over the plain as far as the eye could see.

With their sprawling guy ropes they looked in the distance like great black spiders hugging the earth or like some foul fungi exuded from it.

The cavalry split rapidly up into troops and sections, and scattered over the plain to search and destroy the encampment. The men were delighted. For once the schoolboy instinct for destruction could be given full play. They laughed like children round the bonfires. In half an hour the camp presented an extraordinary spectacle. Little pillars of black and white smoke rose from the burning tents in all directions, and rising, merged into one enormous drifting cloud which hung over the camp. Khaki figures hurried to and fro, little clumps of horses stood by the tents. Far away an immense bonfire of ammunition crackled and roared.

Bert's troop had been ordered to destroy a cluster of tents about half a mile from the centre of the camp. As they drew near they saw that it consisted of two or three small tents, and one exceptionally big one, higher than the others and covering almost as much ground as a large marquee.

As they entered it an old Arab ran out crying. He was seized, and a man detailed

to guard him. He sat huddled on the ground, his face between his knees, wailing aloud in a high-pitched monotone, rocking his body to and fro. The tent was a kind of store. In the centre was a huge pile of camel rugs. Round the sides were packing-cases full of every kind of lumber. There were sacks of soda and soap, boxes and bundles of maize and barley. There was a pair of scales, and in one corner part of a wireless apparatus. One man found a packing-case full of liqueur glasses. Another to his huge delight found a large box full of sample bottles of scent and hair oil from Birmingham. In five minutes the troop was smelling like the Burlington Arcade. Somebody found a large case of tobacco, and cursed because it was not Virginian. A corporal, pursuing a chicken in one corner, pitched headlong and rose spitting and coughing—his face and hair a brilliant yellow. “’Ere,” he said, “what on earth——” It was a sack of saffron.

A group of men near the doorway dissecting a pile of rugs and lumber, felt something hard under the pile. They fished it out and stared at it.

“Well, I’m blowed. It’s one of our

saddles. 'Ave a look at the number." They bent down.

"B. 97. Why, that's poor Will Porter's." Somebody nudged the speaker.

"Look out. There's Bert standing just behind you."

Bert pushed forward, thrusting them aside almost with a gesture of authority. The others fell back in silence, and stood awkwardly watching him. Bert bent down and examined the saddle. Then he stood up and looked round the burning camp. Dusk was falling, and the hundred fires of the burning tents glowed and flared luridly against the evening sky. The smoke rose in straight dark pillars, and hung and swirled over the deserted camp, lit by the fires beneath. Far away the bonfire of ammunition roared and crackled. The huddled figure of the Arab wailed monotonously. Bert looked back at the saddle. The restlessness faded out of his eyes. A look of content stole into them.

THE MAGNET

CAPTAIN SUTHERLAND lay in a cot on the homeward-bound hospital ship, feeling supremely happy. Three days before he had been in those infernal trenches on the Peninsula, dirty, weary, ill, wearing horrible clothes, eating monotonous food, plagued by flies and shells, in hourly danger of his life. Then suddenly one morning, while he was shaving, there had been a scream and a crash, a stunning blow on his shoulder, and he had found himself in the bottom of the trench staring stupidly at his broken razor. They had taken him straight down to the beach, and his mind, in between the moments of anxious fear lest any shell should get him now at the last minute, had wondered vaguely whether the people at the dressing station had ever before admitted a man with his face all over lather.

Now he was lying in the ineffable comfort

of a bed in the peaceful white ward with the sunlight streaming in through a porthole, clean, quiet, and safe. He kept trying to make his mind grasp the fact that this place and that other co-existed in the same universe.

Thank the Lord, he had finished with the army. It was true he would never regain the full use of his left arm, but what did that matter compared with the fact that he was going back *permanently* to the life he loved, the people he loved, the country of fat fields and high hedges, frosty mornings and teeming coverts. Above all, he was free from the terrible Magnet of war, whose irresistible influence he had felt to be luring him on during the whole of the last year. He had felt its first faint pull on the August evening when he first saw the posters in Victoria Station, announcing England's ultimatum to Germany. During the next few weeks he felt himself dragged further and further into its influences, the pull accumulating more and more irresistible strength till at last it had drawn him into the army. And then during the weeks of training he had gradually come wholly into its power till he felt himself an utterly impotent atom being drawn resistlessly—

whither? He had always visualised it as a magnet—this force that held him—partly because he could not understand its nature. It was not a sense of duty or patriotism. He was quite sure of that. These sentiments influenced him—might have even made him join the army—but they were not the Lure. It was not a latent lust of fighting. He knew that sensation, and it was entirely different. It was not a desire to protect his home, for he could never believe that that was threatened. It was not a desire for the good opinion of his fellow-men. He was singularly indifferent to that. For a time he tried to think it was the fascination of the Unknown—the desire for knowledge. But this did not satisfy him either.

At last he had decided in despair that it was a force unfathomable and inexplicable—but nevertheless irresistible.

As he had sat in the darkness on the trawler that carried him from Lemnos to the Peninsula he felt as the iron must feel when it nears the magnet at last. At last he was penetrating to the centre of the puzzle. What would the innermost cell contain? As a matter of fact it had contained nothing.

The night was almost uncannily silent as they steamed into Suvla Bay. There was not a sound of voice, gun, or rifle. The war seemed a phantasy. The little harbour seemed almost gaily lit. A hospital ship blazed in red and green. The channel and landing stage appeared to be lit by little lanterns. There was a light on one of the trawlers in shore and a lantern moving on the beach. Only the black shapes of the battle-ships appearing with startling closeness and suddenness out of the dark were unlit by any lamp. He remembered vividly the little motor barge which had taken him ashore, the bustle of unloading the kits on the beach. It had seemed inconceivable that a shell might at any moment burst in the middle of that group of busily moving figures.

He was met by an officer who escorted him up the beach, telling him casually that the bit of ground they were on was always shelled in the daytime. It gave Sutherland an odd sensation to think that he was actually standing on ground which had been shelled that day.

The officer led Sutherland up a scrubby hill, and ensconced him in a dug-out just

under the crest. It had seemed ridiculous in the utter silence of that starry summer night to take the precaution of sleeping in a hole. Was this the Magnet itself. Surely not. Sutherland felt like a man who has been opening a nest of Chinese boxes and finds the last one empty. And yet he was conscious that he no longer felt the Pull. The Magnet had got him, there was no further need to pull. And yet—of course there was more to come.

He was woken up next morning by the scream of a shell passing high over his dug-out to burst among some transport mules some quarter of a mile away on the beach. There was a tremendous cloud of dust where the shell burst, but it seemed to have no effect on either the mules or the men who were moving about near them. At that distance it seemed to be a lot of fuss about nothing. Sutherland heard later on in the morning that it had killed a driver.

All day long he had lain in the scrub watching the puffs of shrapnel bursting over the flat expanse of the salt lake across which he had to pass that afternoon to join his regiment in the reserve trenches. Towards

evening he had started off across that deserted plain on what he felt was to be the most eventful walk of his life. Every moment he expected to hear the screech and bang of a bursting shell above his head. None came. The walk had been eventless. He had passed a dead mule—bloated, with stiff pointing legs. That was the only sign of war he saw. He passed over the place where a few days before his regiment had been decimated by shrapnel fire during the attack. Beyond the trampled mud there was no sign that anybody had ever passed that way before. Was this the innermost cell to which he had been drawing near so long? He felt that the Magnet had got him. But he did not feel that he had got the Magnet.

Next morning he had been shelled in earnest. The dug-outs were inadequate, and the casualties were heavy. A man in the dug-out next but one to his own had his head blown off. Sutherland ceased to bother his head about magnets. And with that the monotonous repulsiveness of trench life began. The next few weeks were a horrible monotone of dull danger, of physical discomfort, of ennui unutterable, of flies and sand and

sleepless nights, of dirt horror and the odour of decay punctuated by moments of acuteness when the Turks happened to begin a "strafe" of high explosives. Sutherland had actively hated every individual moment as it passed. It is true that had he been given the free choice of going away or staying he would have stayed—not because of any particular sense of duty, but because he was in the grip. But now that he was out of it and could never again be called on to enter into Hell he was unfeignedly glad. The Magnet could never have any power over him again. He knew it to be a fraud—a Sphinx without a secret—a fruit without a core. For the first time for twelve months he felt free.

* * * * *

The first month after Sutherland got out of hospital was the happiest of his whole life. Every instant was an active enjoyment. He used to look forward to the sensation of dressing for dinner. It was a never-palling pleasure to get up to breakfast at nine o'clock in the morning—to feel his time was his own. It gave him a fresh thrill every morning to wake up to the realisation that he was under nobody's orders—to feel that all the

unpleasantness of war lay behind instead of in front.

His arm was not as bad as the doctor had predicted. He could ride, and, with a little practice, he would be able to shoot. The muddy lanes, the grey skies, the brown ploughed uplands, the wet bracken of the coverts gave him a joy so profound and stirring that he felt he would have been willing to pay double the price to experience it. The days were one long ecstasy from the moment he got up and put on clean clothes in the morning to the moment when, bathed and tired, he came downstairs to the hall in the evening to find his mother making tea with the old silver teapot which always seemed to him like a friend come back from the dead.

And then at the beginning of the second month, just when his experience of war seemed to have faded into the unreal shadowland of the past, fear came upon him again.

He felt its first faint stirrings one morning when he had been reading a highly coloured newspaper account of an attack in France. He knew it to be false and wrongly coloured. It was the kind of thing that has been written in all ages about glorious war by men who

have never experienced it. And yet, criminally false as he knew it to be, it gave him an oddly familiar sensation. Surely the Magnet was not getting hold of him again? He had seen all he wanted to see. At least had he? He reflected that he had never been in an attack. Perhaps there was something more. It was ridiculous; besides, he had been definitely cast on account of his arm, so it was no good thinking about it. And yet his arm had got much better than anybody had expected. He determined not to think about it. He would not be drawn into that incomprehensible attraction again. There was no sense in it.

He felt the pull again the following week, and realised with a shock that its power had grown stronger.

He had met a friend at his club-house on leave from France, and they had been laughing together over the peculiarly repulsive timbre of the scream made by shrapnel. Sutherland had felt somehow out of it—cast up by the tide. Life somehow seemed to have become pointless. It seemed lacking in definite and tangible objective. There didn't seem much left that it was worth while to do.

After all, life out there was devilish funny. He chuckled as he thought of the ditches his friend had bobbed into on his way back from the trenches. He could just see him doing it. There was refreshing practicality about it too. There was no convention. Nothing was done for legal and intangible reasons. One was constantly in touch with the ultimate effect. The law of life and death was at least an obvious one. Besides, this life of war was somehow satisfying. It was self-explanatory. It provided a goal. He wondered whether a doctor could be found to pass his arm.

* * * * *

Sutherland lay in the upper deck of the little trawler which was carrying him from Alexandria to M——, where his regiment was still on active service. He thought of that other night and that other trawler on which he had crept up to Suvla Bay. What on earth had induced him to be such a fool a second time? It was true that the fighting he was going to now was nothing like the fighting he had seen at that other place, but still it was war, and he knew quite well what that meant. Already he had begun to crave again for those things for which he had craved months ago

in the trenches, and which, having at last acquired, he had voluntarily and inexplicably thrown away. *Why* had he done it? Now that he was practically face to face with that which had charmed him away from all he loved most, it had again seemed to relax its hold on him as if certain of its prey. He watched the sun sink slowly in a blaze of scarlet down into the glassy Mediterranean. So had he often watched it sink into the same sea from the trenches of Gallipoli, vowing that nothing on earth could ever make him forget the horror of the life he was leading.

He reflected bitterly on the mysterious power which held him so resistlessly in its grip that it had drawn him back in spite of all his knowledge. Alexandria faded into the dusk. That was the last of civilisation. Sutherland went below to see to his kit. He found that his valise had been dumped in a bath half full of soapy water. All his clothes would be soaked. It seemed typical of the life to which he was returning.

It was not so much the campaign itself to which he was returning that filled him with disgust as the fact that he *was* returning. The campaign itself promised to be interesting.

At least it would be different from the deadly monotony of the trenches. When he went up to the Peninsula he had felt he would be lucky if he was not killed. Now he knew that he would be extremely unlucky if he was killed. What irritated him was that of his own free will he was returning to a life that he detested. There had been no earthly reason for him to return. And yet he had returned because he had *had* to return. He was in the grip of something stronger than himself. He knew now that he would never be free. However often he got away it would draw him back at last.

He woke up next morning to find the trawler threading its way up a blue channel between two yellow sand dunes to a little harbour which seemed to be laid out on exactly the same lines as that other harbour to which the Magnet had drawn him. It seemed an age ago. There was a hospital ship, gay green and white and red, a cruiser looking very grey and silent, a mine-sweeper with its solitary gun in the bows and a small collection of dirty little red and black grey tramps lying untidily about the water.

It was not quite so desolate and unreal as

Suvla Bay. There was a bright yellow mosque looking very civilised and neat. There were a few blue and white houses in good repair. There was a square yellow coastguard station on a sandy headland with a flag flying in the sun. But round the whole ran a circle of desolate hills, on the top of which he could just see a line of fortified posts. Yes, this was war, as the other had been, even though in a very mild form.

Sutherland was put ashore at a sandy improvised landing-place and left, surrounded by his kit, to find his new home as best he might. He felt rather forlorn. It was the same old game again. A couple of hundred yards away he could see a little redoubt where the perimeter came down to the sea. Some Indian infantry in their khaki turbans were swarming in and out of the trenches. Beyond was a barbed wire entanglement.

There was a huge pile of boxes near where Sutherland stood. They were labelled Bully Beef. A nausea of utter weariness came over him. What an utter fool he had been! What was this mistress who drew him to her so irresistibly, and then when he was in her grasp

mocked him with his dead desire? What did she want of him? Would she never be satiated? Above all, what did he want of her that he left all to follow her? Perhaps it was Death itself.

SPINKS

IT always seemed rather out of place that his name should be Spinks. He was the only man—at least in Lieutenant Whitby's experience—who really regarded war as a treat. Now the name of Spinks does not exactly suggest the dashing and reckless soldier. The name is enough to cast a blight on the career of the bravest. It is painful to reflect that if Bayard had been christened Spinks his name would never have gone down to history. Nobody could write seriously about the great Spinks *sans peur et sans reproche*.

The pity of it was that in his own village—prior to August, 1914—Spinks and his name had been at one. To look at him, his rather vacant blue eyes, his comfortable yellow moustache, his respectable plumpness, you would say he had been born a churchwarden.

There was a certain atmosphere of camphor-smelling Sunday clothes about his face. Circumstances, moreover, had reinforced Nature. He was a well-to-do baker. To have seen him carrying the collection plate up the aisle would have been to see the perfection of the fitting. And yet he was not a churchwarden ; for the reason that he was extremely strict " chapel." Perhaps this accounted for the rather unexpected austerity of his mouth and jaw. Had he or anybody else known it, he was the kind of stuff of which revolutions are made. The little body of Buckinghamshire men who refused to pay ship money to Charles I. were probably exact replicas of Spinks.

Nevertheless when Spinks first burst in all his glory on the startled eyes of the second regiment one September morning, it was obvious that he and his name were no longer in sympathy.

His shirt (which was black, and had pockets in it) was open at the neck. On his head was an immense sombrero hat which would have taken the shine out of the most Western cow-puncher.

He wore very new field boots and breeches

—the latter being kept in place by a heavy leather belt from which depended a machine which Spinks probably called a clasp-knife. It had in reality very little resemblance to a knife. It was one of those ponderous engines, half portmanteau, half carpenter's chest, which are solely manufactured to meet the requirements of romantic Spinkses. It was a panacea for all the evils of life, a solution to all its crises, a *vade mecum* packed to meet the most unlikely contingencies. Did Spinks find himself all alone with a transport waggon whose trace was broken, there were two bolts let into the handle for the purpose of mending it! Did he go out to a dinner party where they had forgotten the cutlery, there was his knife, fork and spoon! Did he wish to cut down a tree, behold a saw! Did he find himself alone with a man smitten with apoplexy, a lancet! Did he wish to open a tin, draw a cork, cut his nails, or manufacture a salmon fly, it was all there! Spinks was a proud man when he bought that knife.

The *tout ensemble* of the boots, the knife, and the hat was altogether rather alarming. The contrast between the intense respectability of Spinks's face and the swashbuckling

character of his clothes was also a little ludicrous. He was after all still Spinks.

Even in his most Spinkish days there had been—not so much a flaw as a kink in the extreme decorousness of his life. He had been an enthusiastic boy scout; not as a boy, for his boyhood was well passed when the movement began, but as Scoutmaster of the patrol of Jaguars. Almost any Saturday afternoon Spinks might have been observed writhing noiselessly through the hedges of the Midland counties followed by his jaguars. The sight of a decorous churchwarden peering at them through a bramble bush had seriously upset many visitors to the district. Spinks fading into a background was one of the sights of the south of England.

Spinks's friends regarded these labours as exemplary sacrifices to the cause of patriotism. But that was not how Spinks regarded them. To him they were his only real life. He felt them to be the true expression of his inward nature. They were the dream in the sordid reality of Baking. He always felt as he sleuthed the tracks of the carrier's cart or manufactured stretchers, bridges and boats out of walking-sticks that for the time at least he was doing

that for which Nature had fashioned him. There is little wonder that he joined the Yeomanry with a sombrero hat on his head, and a "this is the life" expression on his face. The thrilling excitement of war had come at last. His dreams were to come true after all. He had found his *métier*. Danger, romance and action lay before him. During training he was almost embarrassingly zealous and painfully earnest. Lieutenant Whitby, to whose troop he had been posted, certainly found him a Trial. For the first few weeks in the barrack square his zeal got little outlet. It was believed that he used to lie in wait for officers in order to have the secret glory of saluting them. But beyond that he could do little.

It was when the field days began that he became slightly embarrassing. The first day they were out he kept plaguing Whitby to let him draw the enemy's fire by hoisting a hat on the end of a stick. Whitby pointed out to him that as the enemy had no rifles it would be a little difficult to draw their fire, even by displaying the whole person. But Spinks didn't seem satisfied. Then he kept stopping to listen for the enemy. He would unship

the clasp-knife and stick the blade in the ground and lie flat on his face listening to the handle. Whitby got so tired of it at last that he sent him out to scout on the flank. He crawled off under a hedge like a sleuth-hound. Whitby thought he had got rid of him, but a few minutes later, happening to look at a haystack a couple of fields away, he saw a sudden flurry of hay and was amazed to see Spinks disappear into the top with the celerity of a sand lizard into a sand hill. The sight of a churchwarden in a sombrero hat suddenly disappearing into the top of a haystack so upset Whitby that he didn't know what to do for some time. It seemed to be one of those situations which are too unexpected to deal with. The cavalry book is strangely silent concerning the proper conduct of young officers on observing a churchwarden inter himself in the top of a haystack. Whitby walked across to remonstrate. At first he could see nothing of Spinks at all. Then he distinguished an extremely observant eye peering out from under a wisp of hay.

Whitby asked it peevishly what it thought it was doing.

"Hush, sir!" said the eye in a shocked

voice. "An old South African dodge, observing from inside a haystack."

"Well, you'll have to come out. You can't go all about the country making holes in people's haystacks and sitting in them. What will the farmers say?"

Spinks emerged obedient but unconvinced. Whitby returned to the troop. But it was no good. Haystacks had an absolutely irresistible attraction for Spinks. A quarter of a mile further on he spied another one on the far horizon. He was heading for it before you could say "knife." Whitby, who had been keeping a wary eye on him, caught him just as he reached it.

"No, sir," said Spinks, hurriedly, "I wasn't going *into* it. Only just going to look *over* it, sir." But Whitby had had enough. He couldn't spend the whole morning exhuming Spinks from haystacks. He brought him back to the troop. Spinks began again with the clasp-knife and the hat.

After about half an hour, Whitby felt it was a case of either himself or Spinks, so, selecting a tract of country chiefly devoted to the culture of corn, he sent Spinks out again with instructions to get out as far as he could.

Whitby felt that as long as it was out of his sight Spinks could get into a haystack and stay there for the rest of the war.

That was the last he saw of Spinks that morning. After about an hour's scouting the enemy had spied Spinks peering at them through a hedge, and had promptly captured him and shut him up in a barn, where there wasn't any hay. But he subsequently informed Whitby triumphantly that he had drawn the enemy's fire by hoisting his hat on the end of a stick.

In spite of it all, however, Spinks got on. He really was a good scout, and he was also a keen and intelligent soldier. The stripes on his arm grew in number. He still occasionally got on Whitby's nerves, although Whitby felt a growing affection for him. He used to say Spinks made him jump. He said Spinks would appear and disappear like the Cheshire Cat in "Alice in Wonderland." Spinks would suddenly appear out of the ground on a field day and startle Whitby with a hoarse whisper just as Whitby was enjoying a quiet pipe. Then before Whitby had time to collect himself, Spinks would be crawling off into the brambles again.

Spinks became Whitby's troop sergeant before long, and his ingenuity was always getting them into trouble.

On one occasion Spinks got a patrol of four men through a village (which was held by a very crusty old Major who had made his disposition with painful correctitude) by chartering a haycart, putting on the driver's clothes and hiding his men in the hay. The Major himself stood on the village green like Napoleon and watched the haycart go by. The result was that the whole field day, which had been carefully planned as an exercise in reconnaissance, became a fiasco. There was a terrible row, and the Major, who had prided himself on his disposition, was in such a rage that Whitby hardly dared to go into the Mess for a week.

On another occasion Spinks was sent out scouting during some night operation, and found a hostile squadron belonging to the same Major sitting down in a road. The Major and the only two subalterns who were out that night were just going off up a hill to do a little reconnaissance. Spinks watched them well out of hearing, and then gave an imitation of the Major's voice, and marched

the squadron off to his own lines where they were all captured. That ruined another field day. Whitby was appalled when he heard what had happened. He seriously considered whether it wouldn't be better to desert on the spot. All he wanted was a quiet life, and he reflected peevishly on the fate which had sent him the one troop sergeant who made that an impossibility. Not that anything would have induced him to part with Spinks.

The fracas that ensued justified his worst expectations. It lasted nearly a week. Spinks's stripes hung in the balance. If Whitby had not possessed a tongue of oil and silver they would have gone. In fact, the Major began by threatening to resign unless Spinks were reduced to the ranks on the spot. But fortunately his passion was short-lived. In civilian life he possessed a sense of humour. Nevertheless, Whitby felt the position was delicate. He kept Spinks well in leash for some time afterwards.

Spinks himself was a little chastened. It must not be supposed that he himself viewed any of these amazing exploits in a humorous light. Nothing would have shocked him more than the intrusion of

levity into serious military operations. He did not see that what he had done was either funny or extraordinary. It was no more funny or extraordinary than if he had done these things to a real enemy. He was genuinely surprised and distressed to find that the Major was annoyed.

One of the things that endeared Spinks most to his officer was his passionate desire to go to the Front. (Spinks always spoke of it in capital letters with a hushed voice.) Other men, it is true, wanted to go—in fact every man in the regiment that Whitby had seen wanted to go, but they wanted to go for different reasons. A sense of duty, a desire for kudos, a desire to suffer that which their friends were suffering, a vague feeling that they couldn't bear to have been out of it, these were the motives of the vast majority of men. Spinks, on the other hand, wanted to go to the Front exactly as a child wants to go to a pantomime.

His present existence was an extreme joy. The romance of his equipment which had not yet worn off—he had looked like a child of ten when he was issued with his bandolier—the open-air life, the scouting, the feeling of

expectancy, were all equally wonderful, but the supreme treat was still to come. He always believed implicitly all rumours of a move, and his eyes lighted with excitement. His happiest moment was when, about Christmas time, the story came that the Germans had landed in Norfolk. He never had doubted the truth of the story, and he never doubted that his regiment would be among the first sent to meet them. "Do you think we shall be in touch with them to-morrow, sir?" he had asked Whitby, his eyes glistening with excitement. It came as quite a blow to him that England was not really invaded. "Still, they may come yet, sir," he had said with a revival of hope.

And yet Spinks had never lost his look of spotless respectability with all his soldiering. He still looked as if he ought to have been a churchwarden. Whitby always felt that Spinks was the sort of man who conquered the New World. But he knew that the first thing Spinks would have done on landing would have been to establish an urban district council.

* * * * *

Spinks did not arrive in the trenches till

the regiment had been there some weeks. Both he and Whitby had been sent to the first regiment with a draft just before it left England. He had had, of course, to take down the stripes of which he was so immensely proud. But he was amply compensated by the fact that he was going abroad. By an unkind stroke of fate he had dislocated his shoulder the day before the regiment left Egypt for the Peninsula, and he had had to see them go off without him. It was the great tragedy of his life.

As soon as Whitby heard Spinks had arrived he went off to see him. He had a feeling that Spinks would liven things up, whether for himself or the enemy he wasn't quite sure.

Spinks was standing in the middle of the trench looking about him with a childlike expression of wonder and interest on his face. His eyes showed that he found the passing shells a good deal more startling and frightening than he had expected, but his whole pose proclaimed defiant indifference to them.

"Good morning, Spinks. I'm very glad to have you back again."

"Good morning, sir. I'm very glad to

get back again. It's grand to be There at last. Is that the enemy over there, sir ? ”

Before Whitby could stop him he was up on the fire-step and peering over the parapet showing a good head and shoulders.

“ Come down, you idiot ! You'll be shot up there.”

Two bullets plunked into the sandbags. Spinks descended with studied leisureliness.

“ I saw their parapet, sir,” he said, excitedly. “ It's over there.”

“ Yes, yes, I know it is.” Whitby felt rather snappy. “ Don't go and do that again, Spinks, or we shall lose you.”

“ Very good, sir,” said Spinks. “ When do we attack, sir ? ” He asked as he might have asked what time parade would be.

“ Never, I should think,” said Whitby, “ at least not in this part of the line, anyway.”

Spinks's face fell.

“ Do *they* attack often, sir ? ” said Spinks, hopefully.

“ I've been in this infernal trench nearly three weeks and they haven't attacked yet or looked like it. Not so much as a bombing raid ! ”

“ What do you do all the while then, sir ?

Just sit in this trench and do nothing? ” This was not as war should be. Spinks had expected an uninterrupted series of attacks and counter-attacks. He had been surprised not to find one going on when he arrived.

“ Just sit in this trench as you say, Spinks,” said Whitby. “ I don’t know about doing nothing, though. There’s plenty of digging, and ration fatigues, and you’ll be on guard one hour in three, night and day.”

“ But I mean no fighting, sir ? ”

“ No. No fighting, unless you call dodging shells fighting. That’ll keep you active.”

Whitby left Spinks with a look of perplexity on his face. Spinks’s ideas were undergoing a revolution.

That afternoon, as Whitby had foreseen, Spinks kept him in a perpetual state of tension. He began comparatively harmlessly by playing about with a periscope which he had found in his traverse. But as there was not a sign of a Turk to be seen above the low line of their parapet he soon grew tired of that. Then he discovered what he took to be a loophole in the Turkish trench and spent the next half-hour trying to put a bullet into it, but he exposed so much of his person in the process

that Whitby had to go out and stop him. Then he tried to draw the Turkish fire with his hat; but the Turks had long learnt the difference between an occupied and an unoccupied hat. No occupied hat ever exposes itself so long and luringly.

He next turned his attention to manufacturing a complicated machine of cardboard by which he hoped to determine the exact position of the fixed rifle which periodically threw a bullet into one of the sandbags of his traverse. It was an ingenious engine. The only difficulty was to get an obliging Turk to shoot at it. Whitby was afraid the Turks might take it for a new kind of machine gun or Trench mortar and start shelling it, so he went out and had it removed.

Then Spinks formed a theory that there was a sniper in a little clump of stunted trees about halfway across to the Turkish lines, and wanted to crawl out and shoot him. Whitby knew perfectly well that there wasn't a sniper there and never had been, but he couldn't convince Spinks. This spoilt Whitby's afternoon. Instead of being able to go to sleep, he had to keep bobbing out of his dug-out to see that Spinks was still there.

Spinks saw his error towards evening, but that didn't make things any better. He then wanted to go out to the trees himself and spend the next day sniping the Turks. It was no good pointing out to him that if either side suspected a sniper in those trees, which were the only trees anywhere near, they could riddle them with machine guns in five minutes. Whitby felt life was becoming a trial.

Next day, however, Spinks was rather more subdued. That morning in the small hours, a sentry had been shot through the head in the traverse next his own. Spinks and another man had been told off to shovel out the mess on the floor of the trench. It was a cold raw night. It was drearily dark and drizzling a little. The wind was blowing down the trench. They worked in shivering silence. Two other men put the body in a blanket and carried it down the trench, stumbling over sleepy, cursing men. They heaved it up on the side of a communication trench to await burial the following day. It lay there all day stiff and enigmatical. That was the end to all the business and chattering ideals of men. To be carried in the cold miserable air of the small hours down a dark and muddy ditch,

past rows of shivering men, a limp sack to be cast aside out of the way. Spinks was struck with a cold horror and a deadly nausea at the work he had to perform. Somehow this had never entered into his rosy conception of war.

The weary interminable routine of trench life, moreover, began to eat into his soul. Every third hour night and day he would mount the fire-step, and for a seemingly interminable period gaze out on to the same unchanging stretch of rank grass which lay between him and the few sandbags which marked the Turkish trench. At the end of an hour he would be relieved, and would try and roll out of the way of passing feet and sleep. Every day he cooked the same desiccated vegetables and the same hunks of meat at the same brazier of biscuit boxes. Every afternoon he would dig interminably at holes which never seemed to get any larger. At dusk, and in the shivery early morning he would put on his webbing and stand to arms. But he never saw a Turk or so much as a movement in the Turkish trench.

Every other night he would go on ration fatigue. In company with a string of other tired and sleepy men he would wander down miles of

muddy trench, stumbling over sleeping and abusive men—treading on hands and heads—bumping into dark traverses, halting while other parties filed past him, past dark shapes of gaunt trees and ruined huts, past sleeping batteries of hidden guns, occasionally stooping low to run across an open space of tall grass where the trench was faulty, while an occasional bullet hissed overhead or swished through the grass at his side, seeing nothing but darkness and sandbags, hearing nothing but the monotonous drone of the frogs or the occasional whine of a “non-stop” shell passing high overhead, till at last he reached the dark bustle of the A.S.C. dump. Then back again through the same endless trenches, this time carrying a back-breaking burden of half a hundredweight or more, past the same gaunt trees, the same stark ruined huts, over the same sleeping forms, through trenches often too narrow to admit the box he was carrying, barking his knuckles and shoulders, forcing his unwieldy burden round the corners of traverses, sitting down to rest every few hundred yards and feeling that no power on earth could get that box another step, and yet after five minutes lifting it and carrying it on

again only to begin counting the steps to the next rest when he would have the ineffable relief of throwing it down again—over the same open spaces of clinging grass—past the same sleeping batteries, almost crying with impotent vexation when they had to stop to let another party stumble past, hearing the same hiss and thump of the bullets, the same drone of the frogs in the moonlight—till at last he threw down his burden for good and rolled up for an hour's sleep before standing to arms in the miserable dawn. Then followed the same day of the dust and sand which trickled down your back, of flies which settled on you in sheets, of occasional shells, of unutterable routine.

It was not long before even Spinks was subdued to the usual sullen patience of the trenches, although the light of hope flickered in his eyes to the last.

It was about the tenth day that he was hit. Whitby was in the traverse at the time, and fetched the stretcher-bearers himself to take him away. Later on in the day he went to see him in the dressing station. A shrapnel bullet had landed in Spinks's shoulder and his left hand had been shattered by a bit of shell case, but he was not as yet in great pain.

" Well, Spinks, this is rotten luck for you. How are you feeling ? "

" Pretty well, sir, thank you, considering, I'm afraid my soldiering's finished though, sir." His voice was very wistful. " My left hand won't ever be much use again, I think."

" Well, anyway you've seen what war's like now," said Whitby, consolingly.

" Yes, sir, I suppose I have. It ain't what I expected though, quite." There was a world of disillusionment in his voice. " I was hit just as I was bending down cooking a bit of bacon. It ain't what I thought it was during training, sir. There ain't—— " Spinks seemed to be groping for a word. " There ain't the scope some'ow," said Spinks.

FROM SOMEWHERE IN AFRICA

WE have just returned from another of those little expeditions which are becoming almost a habit with the — Frontier Force when in search of an enemy whose discretion is only rivalled by that of the German High Seas Fleet.

We moved out four days ago with all the pomp of war—horse, foot and guns, ambulances and long trains of transport waggons, the fierce vivid fighting of the desert before us. We rode seventeen miles that day and camped at some wells. As we rolled ourselves in our blankets round the camp-fires to rest for the glorious contest of the morrow our hearts should have been filled with dreams of undying fame. But we were really wondering when the squadron transport would arrive with our porridge and sausages for breakfast.

Next morning we were in the saddle by 3 a.m. and after some ten or twelve hours of

unbroken and undisputed progress we captured two Arab shepherds in charge of as many as eight sheep. This *succès fou* was the cause of justifiable satisfaction.

In the first place we scented liver and bacon for breakfast. In the second place it seemed to promise a settlement of the long-standing dispute between me and the General. The General has a preposterous theory about the existence and hostility of a vast number of mythical Arabs in our immediate neighbourhood. Now this is obviously absurd. With the exception of three palm-trees, which belong to us, there is nothing but sand for about two hundred miles in all directions, and even an Arab cannot subsist entirely on sand. Of course, if there were any Arabs near us, they would be so enraged at finding themselves at a spot two hundred miles from anything except sand that they would be violently hostile to any one, especially to the people who had engaged the only three palm-trees in the neighbourhood. But it is their existence that I dispute with the General. It is true he took a most unfair dialectical advantage, about a fortnight ago, by having a large battle. But my contention is that

the enemy on this occasion were merely orange-sellers from the nearest town, hired by the General for the purpose of argument.

These two shepherds, however, did seem to support his theory of the existence of Arabs, but as to their hostility there was still room for doubt. They were both extraordinarily old and unbelievably dirty. Also they were, as was very natural, extremely frightened. Seeing that they knew themselves to be the only living people for quite a number of miles round, it must have appeared to them that the entire —— Frontier Force had come out solely for the purpose of capturing them, and that, as it had ridden some forty miles to do it, it would not be in a good temper. It was therefore rather hard to judge of their hostility, because as soon as they were confronted with the General and the interpreter they gave one yell of "Allah!" and fell flat, face downwards, in the sand, from which position they refused to move. They would not even budge when the interpreter took all their clothes off with a view to searching them. They probably thought this was merely a preliminary to skinning them. When they were finally induced to speak, I

believe they were understood to say that we were the first men they'd seen for eight years. I don't wonder they were frightened. If you have lived all your life all alone in the middle of a howling desert with Grandfather it's a very frightening thing when a complete Frontier Force marches forty miles for the sole purpose of capturing you.

But the day's excitement was not over yet. Towards evening I took my troop off at a gallop in person and captured a camel. It was a very young camel, hardly bigger than a sheep on stilts, and it cried like a child at the sight of me. This, I hope, was not so much due to my frightful appearance in my red moustaches as to the fact that it had probably never seen a man at all (not being eight years old), let alone an army.

The curious aversion which it conceived for my moustache threatened to hold up the entire Frontier Force for the rest of the day, for it would neither be led nor driven. Fortunately, however, we had a very black Soudanese camel-driver with us as guide, and he came and spat at it, which soothed it considerably, and it followed him like a lamb. We got it back to camp next day and it is

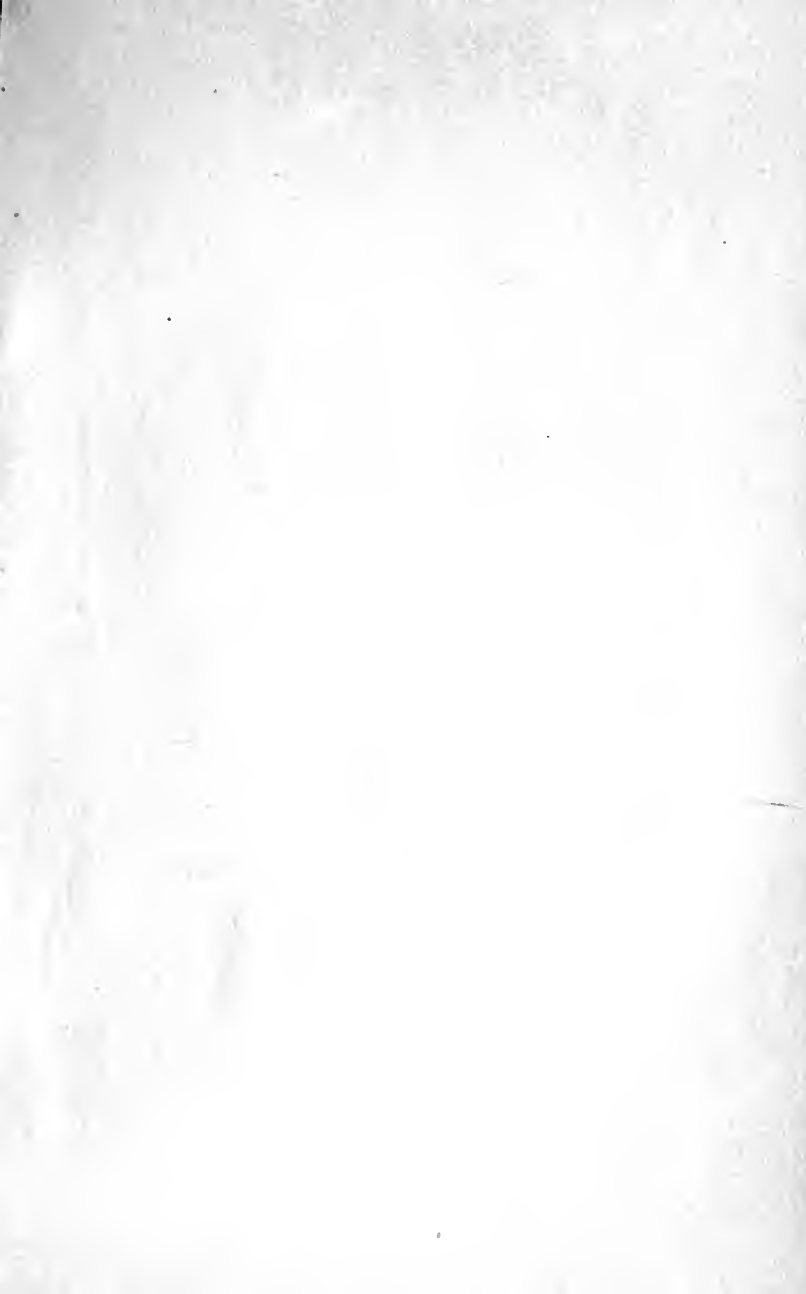
tied up near my tent. It has apparently made up its mind to waive the moustache question, and we now spit at one another in the friendliest fashion whenever I pass. I hope in time to train it to bring up my bath-water in the morning from the three palm-trees.

Later.—The camel was the last episode of the campaign, and we returned to — yesterday. The total bag of a four days' expedition was sheep, eight; shepherds, two; camel, one. The human section was subsequently released on the grounds that their political views were satisfactory.

L'ENVOI—A CONTRAST

Where the lone wind sweeps o'er the dreary dunes
Away to the flats, and the sea, and the storm,—
Where the tall bents whisper their wailing tunes
 To the drifting sea-gull's flickering form ;
Where the cold grey flats and the cold grey sea
Melt unaware in the cold grey sky,
Where the misty horizon tricks the eye,
Where nothing is heard but the curlew's cry,—
 There will we wander, you and I.





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